The Word of God and Mankind

Augustin Cardinal Bea

GEOFFREY CHAPMAN
LONDON DUBLIN MELBOURNE 1967

Geoffrey Chapman Ltd
18 High Street, Wimbledon, London SW 19

Geoffrey Chapman (Ireland) Ltd
5–7 Main Street, Blackrock, County Dublin

Geoffrey Chapman Pty Ltd
44 Latrobe Street, Melbourne, Vic 3000, Australia

© 1967, translation, Geoffrey Chapman Ltd

English translation by Dorothy White

First published 1967

BT
264
B36
E5

Nihil obstat: D. Alanus Clark, D.D., Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur: H. Gibney, Vicarius Generalis

Datum Southwarci die 18a Augusti 1967

This book is set in 11/12 pt. Plantin

Made and printed in Great Britain by Willmer Brothers Limited, Birkenhead

165135

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The Scripture quotations in this publication are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition, copyrighted 1965 and 1966 by the Division of Christian Education, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Quotations from Council documents are taken from Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (editor), *The Documents of Vatican II*, London and New York, 1966

When, in the course of this commentary, a number is quoted (for example no. 16), without the addition of the name of a Council document, the number always refers to the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*

Act. Ap. Sed.	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
Denz.	Enchiridion Symbolorum, Denzinger (Rahner ed.)
E.B.	Enchiridion Biblicum
P.G.	Patrologia Græca
P.L.	Patrologia Latina (Migne)

Introduction

This book, which is a commentary on one of the most important Council documents—the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, is also, as it were, a sequel to the author's two previous books, the *Way to Unity after the Council* and *The Church and Mankind.*

The connection between *The Church and Mankind* and this present study is apparent in the titles; both books consider these questions from the point of view of mankind as a whole, and wish to be of service to all men. *The Way to Unity after the Council* has for its sub-title 'A Study of the Implications of the Council for the Unity of Mankind', but there is a closer link between the present book and *The Church and Mankind* because both studies deal with the way in which the Church thinks of mankind, and with what she has to offer to men. The present work studies a particular aspect of the immense field opened out in *The Church and Mankind.* It is an aspect of supreme importance because it forms the basis and starting point of all that the Church can offer in God's name to the human family, that is, the 'word' by means of which God has revealed himself to men, 'so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself' (no. 2).

As there is no other name under the heavens given to man by which they may be saved (cf. Acts 4:12), except the name of Christ, the 'eternal Word who enlightens all men' (no. 4), so the Council, 'hearing the Word of God with reverence', proclaims it 'so that, by hearing the message of salvation, the whole world may believe, by believing may hope, and by hoping may love' (no. 1).

1

A great treasure entrusted to mankind

'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world' (Heb. 1 : 1-2). So begins the letter of St Paul to the Hebrews, describing in these few words God's wonderful and merciful dealings with mankind. His work for men through the ages is the substance and nucleus of the great message which the Church hands down from one generation of men to another. At the time of the Second Vatican Council she decided to explain the message more fully and proclaim it with even greater solemnity in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*. In the prologue to this document, rightly considered one of the most important of the whole Council, she first of all affirms her faith in this great gift of God to all men: 'Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it confidently, this most sacred Synod takes its direction from these words of St John: "We announce to you the eternal life which was with the Father, and has appeared to us. What we have seen and have heard we announce to you, in order that you also may have fellowship with us, and that our fellowship may be with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:2-3).' This faith inspires the supreme authority of the Church, invested in the Council, to expound more fully the profound truth concerning the revelation of God to mankind in Jesus Christ, and the way in which this truth is handed down to all men: 'Therefore, following in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican this present Council wishes to set forth authentic teaching about divine revelation and about how it is handed on.' The final and sublime purpose of this solemn proclamation is 'that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, that by believing it may hope; and by hoping, it may love' (*ibid.*; cf. also no. 7: '. . . revealed for the salvation of all nations').

So, by expressly assigning to this document the purpose of seeking that all men may believe and be saved, the Council fathers have set upon it the characteristic seal of the Second Vatican Council, namely, the Church's constant desire and aim to bear the salvation of all men in mind, to be at their service and to act for the good of the whole human family. In fact, as we see in its very first Constitution, that on the *Sacred Liturgy*, the Council had thought and spoken with this aim in mind. The document states that the Liturgy 'reveals the Church as a sign raised above the nations, under which the scattered sons of God may be gathered together, until there is one fold and one shepherd' (*Liturgy*, no. 2). And in its principal document, the *Constitution on the Church*, the Council asserts: 'By her relationship with Christ the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity' (*Church*, no. 1; cf. *Decree on Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 12). Elsewhere the Council explains how already, when the Church was first set up, on the day of Pentecost, 'that union of all peoples in a universal faith was to be achieved by the Church of the New Covenant, a Church which speaks all tongues, with loving acceptance and understanding, and in this way overcomes the disruptive effect of Babel' (*Missions*, no. 4). Therefore the Church 'is summoned with especial urgency to save and renew every creature, so that all things may be restored in Christ, and in him mankind may form one family and one people' (*ibid.*, no. 1; cf. *Church*, no. 28). So God's plan will be realized when 'all who share one human nature, regenerated in Christ through the Holy Spirit and together beholding the glory of God, will be able to say "Our Father"' (*Missions*, no. 7; cf. *Modern World*, no. 40). Therefore the Church is 'a sure and lasting seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race' (*Church*, no. 9).

The theme of the Constitution: 'The word of God'

The document we are now studying frequently describes its theme in the term 'revelation', and at other times uses the biblical expression 'word of God'. This latter term owes its origin to the fact that God revealed himself by speaking to men through the prophets, and then through his Son, as we have already seen stated in the text of the letter to the Hebrews. Consequently, the term 'word of God' is very common in Scripture, and may be considered as God's own description of his self-revelation to men. Psychologically speaking, this term enables us to understand, almost as if by intuition, the nature of that divine gift to man which is God's revelation of himself. Only a little reflection on this is needed to make us understand also the greatness of the divine gift. In fact, a man with even a trace of religious faith must be surprised, or rather astounded, to think that the infinite God, the Creator, is interested in puny man and even speaks to him. This wonder may be even more strongly felt by the man of today, who has many reasons for acquiring an ever more lively and acute sense of his own littleness. In fact, as a result of numerous spectacular discoveries, particularly the recent flights into outer space, he should have become more and more aware of the greatness of the universe, and feel his own tiny self to be, as it were, lost in these immense spaces. Moreover, as a result of the 'population explosion' and of his bitter experiences of two world wars, he will almost inevitably feel like a grain of sand in the immense mass of more than three milliard men. When, notwithstanding all this, he perceives that God is speaking to him, he should be filled with wonder and cry to God with the psalmist: 'What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?' (Psalm 8:5).

(1) Men will feel even more astonishment and awe-struck gratitude if they consider the divine reality contained within this expression: 'word of God'. Scripture enables us to con-

template the 'word of God' in the act of creation. 'In the beginning' the whole world was formed out of nothing through the creative word of God: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth' (Psalm 33:6; cf. Gen. 1; Wisdom 9:1; Heb. 11:3). And ever since he created the world God has been 'upholding the universe by his word of power' (Heb. 1:3). St Peter explains this thought more fully: 'By the word of God the heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water.... But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men' (II Peter 3:5, 7). 'All flesh is grass' says Isaiah with a brilliant metaphor: 'and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand for ever' (Isaiah 40:7 et seq.). And so the psalmist exhorts us: 'Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth' (Psalm 33:8).

(2) Now we begin to understand the great significance of this word for the life of men. It is a lamp to their feet and a light to their path (cf. Psalm 119:105), the source of saving wisdom for their lives (cf. Prov. I:3, 6, 23; Eccli. 1:5), the fertile seed which, received by faith in their souls, makes their whole lives fruitful for time and for eternity (cf. Luke 8:4-15; Matt. 13:3-23; Mark 4:3-20). Therefore the word of God is man's supreme hope (cf. Psalms 119:49, 74, 81, 114, 147; 130:54 etc.). Hence the wonderfully poetical expressions of the Song of Moses, images taken from the life of nature, when, speaking to Israel in the name of God, as lawgiver and prophet he said: 'May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distil as the dew, as the gentle rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herb' (Deut. 32:2). Describing the miracle of the manna that fell from heaven, the Book of Wisdom (speaking to God) says that this miracle was performed 'so that thy sons, whom thou didst love, O Lord, might learn that it is not the production of crops that feeds men, but that thy word preserves all those who trust in thee' (Wisdom 16:26). This is the consideration which Christ put forward when the devil tempted him to perform miracles: he quoted from Deuteronomy: 'Men shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3; Luke 4:4). Faith in the vital significance of the word of God in man's life causes men to feel a real hunger for it, the hunger of which Amos speaks, so that the harshest punishment which God inflicts is when he deprives man of the word of God: 'Behold, the days are coming', says the Lord God, 'when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it' (Amos 8:11-12).

(3) In the preaching of Christ we are most conscious of the word of God as it concerns the salvation of man. For this reason Christ's words were said to be 'spirit and life' (John 6:63), meaning that for man they are the source and cause of the true and superior life which is eternal and divine. In fact, although in the above quoted text Christ is actually referring to his promise of the Eucharist, his words are indeed of general significance, as he was to assert on another occasion: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life . . .' (John 5:24). That is why St Peter was to say to Christ: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God' (John 6:68-69).

(a) Let us first of all consider the word of Christ in a context in which it is revealed in the fulness of its divine authority and power, that is, in the resurrection of the dead. In a famous symbolical and prophetical vision the prophet Ezekiel had contemplated the creative and life-giving power of the word of God as it worked upon 'dry bones' that were bereft not only of any life but of any necessary pre-condition of life. In his vision God said to the prophet: 'Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord".' And as Ezekiel prophesied 'there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone'. And the prophet says: 'And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.' Then God said to the prophet: 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ' And when Ezekiel had done as the Lord commanded 'the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host' (Ez. 37:1-10). Christ himself did not hesitate to claim the same startling effect for his own message, which will be heard until the end of time. To the Jews of Jerusalem who refused to believe that the Son had life in himself and the power to judge mankind, Christ asserted: 'Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment' (John 5:28-29).

(b) Since this eternal life is effected by preaching the gospel of Christ, and imparted in baptism, St James says of God that 'of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures' (James I:18). The life to which we have been born is none other than the 'communion with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ', of whom St John speaks. We have already quoted his words from the prologue to the document we are studying. St Peter also states that we have been 'born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God', and, quoting the words of Isaiah to which we have already referred (p. 12) he continues: ' "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides for ever." That word is the good news which was preached to you' (I Peter 1:23-25).

(c) Notice that in these last quotations from St James and St Peter the expression 'word of God' does not refer, as might be thought, to the written word, but to the actual preaching of the gospel. And the use of the 'word of God' as meaning the word preached to men is not unique or even rare. In fact, it may be said that in the New Testament, except where Old Testament writings are referred to, the 'word of God' is the message proclaimed in preaching. Considering the importance of this terminology for an understanding of the New Testament, we will adduce a few more examples. St Paul writes to the Thessalonians: 'And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers' (I Thess. 2:13). This text is so clear as not to require any comment. In the Acts of the Apostles also we read: 'And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7; cf. also 13:49). There is no doubt that reference to the 'word' as increasing meant that the gospel was being preached more widely. As the preachers spread out to the various cities, so with them and by their means the word of God 'increased' throughout Palestine. St Paul wrote to Timothy that for the sake of the gospel he was 'suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered' (II Tim. 2:9; cf. also II Thess. 3:1; Titus 2:5; Rom. 10:17).

Although this terminology may surprise some modern readers it is quite normal in Scripture. In fact, from the earliest Old Testament times, 'the word of God' did not come to men primarily and principally in a written form, but by word of mouth and the preaching of the prophets. This is true also of the New Testament. The research undertaken into the history of language-forms (*Formgeschichte*) has confirmed that, a long time before the word of God was written in the New Testament, when men spoke of the word of God they meant the word preached by Christ and his apostles. This fact is amply illustrated by the language used in the New Testament. In fact, when the term 'word of God' or simply 'word' refers to the written word of the Old Testament, it is used in association with the verb 'to read' (*anaginoskein*: Matt. 21:42; 22:31; 24:15; Mark 12:26; Luke 10:26, etc.) or with the words 'it is written'. When instead it refers to the New Testament gospel it is used in association with the verbs 'to preach' (cf. Acts 8:4; 15:35; II Tim. 4:2 etc.), 'to speak' (*balein*: Acts 4:29, 31; 11:19, 13:46; 14:25; Phil. 1:14, etc.) or, speaking of those who received the message, with the verb 'to hear' (cf. Acts 4:4; 10:44; 13:7; 44:15, etc.). Hence the fact that faith is so essentially linked with 'hearing' the word of God by listening to the preacher's word, that the term *akoê*, which literally means hearing, becomes synonymous with 'preaching' (cf. Rom. 10:17; John 12:38; Gal. 3:2, 5).

When we consider the profound and vast significance of the word of God, in the sense of the gospel message preached or contained in Scripture, and remember its decisive importance for mankind, this gift of God seems almost too beautiful to be true and real, and we are astounded, like a man who has just heard he has come into an enormous fortune and cannot believe it. And yet this supremely precious treasure has truly been entrusted to mankind. Our faith assures us that this word of God addressed to mankind is a reality, and that it is so great and beautiful that we shall understand it only when at the end of time the word will have been fulfilled, when we have found perfect communion with the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, and when we shall be like God because we shall see him as he is (cf. I John 3:2).

Problems connected with the word of God

In proportion as we recover from our amazement and in faith become conscious of how great is this treasure which has been entrusted to men, we are like men who, after having received welcome and important news, begin to recover their wits and use their reasoning powers again. We find ourselves asking a host of questions. Where and what is this treasure? How can we understand this manifestation of God? How can we listen to his speech? What precise forms does the word of God assume? And if this treasure is essential for the life of men in time and in eternity the question at once arises: how does this message of life reach the generations who came after God had revealed himself to man and spoken to him? Who are the guardians of the word of God, who have the duty to ensure its authentic and integral transmission amid all human vicissitudes, as generations pass away and new ones come into being.

Besides the problem of handing on God's revealed word there is also that of expounding it. It came from God in times that are removed from our own by thousands of years, and it has come down to us from a world with a culture very different from our own. Therefore, if it is really intended for all mankind it must be understood in all cultures and traditions, even if these are quite different from that in which it was first received and formulated. Moreover, it is not possible that with the transmission of this word of God from one generation to another, from one culture to another, it may have been distorted, even to the point of becoming unrecognizable, of losing its vital force, or even becoming harmful? What guarantee have we that we still possess the authentic word of God?

Another question arises: what is there in common between the word of God handed on by oral tradition, for example in the preaching of the apostles, and the word as written down in the Old and New Testaments? And what is the difference between these? One could mention also the problems which arise from a study of the written word of God. Even supposing that there is such a thing as the written word of God, how and in what sense can we say that God is the author of human writings, the authors of most of which are known to us? And who guarantees that God is literally the author of certain parts of Scripture? What does this *really* mean and what consequences arise from this, regarding these writings and the life of men? And finally, in what way can the word of God, handed down orally or in writing, become the source of life for men? What must men do to live by it?

Having put forward the chief questions that must be asked, let us now indicate the general structure of this *Constitution on Divine Revelation.*

The prologue sets out the theme of the document, and the first part explains God's general purpose in revealing himself to man and the means which he employed (no. 2); then we consider the fulfilment of this purpose in the history of salvation found in the Old Testament (no. 3) and in the New, that is, in Christ (no. 4); finally we have man's response to God's revelation of himself (no. 5). The second part deals with the transmission of divine revelation from one generation to another through the preaching of apostles and through the word written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with emphasis upon the former means, that is the sacred tradition and teaching authority (*Magisterium*) of the Church, and the connection between these and the Bible. The remaining four chapters of the document are entirely dedicated to the written word of God; the first of these explains the mystery of Scripture, its inspiration, its inerrancy and its interpretation; two chapters are dedicated to the two parts of the Bible, the Old and the New Testament. The last chapter which concludes the Constitution indicates the part played by the written word of God in the life and work of the Church.

The importance of this Constitution

Our brief references to the theme of this document, to the problems it deals with and to its structure, are enough to indicate the immense importance to be attached to it. This importance is emphasized also by the fact that when the final secret vote was taken it was approved of almost unanimously: on 18 November 1965 only six out of 2350 votes were negative. The doctrine contained in this Constitution is therefore proposed unanimously by the Catholic episcopate of all the nations and

continents of the world. This unanimity is all the more significant in that it was reached only after long and laborious preparation and discussion.[1]

(1) Let us briefly note some aspects of the long process by which this document was drawn up. First of all, let us remember what happened on 20 November 1962, only about six weeks after the beginning of the Council. After the rather unexpected events of the first days, in connection with the election of the Conciliar Commissions, the discussions were proceeding at a leisurely pace and in relative calm. But when the Fathers began to examine the *schema* of the Constitution on the 'sources of revelation'—this was the title of the *schema* which dealt with our subject—two positions were revealed which seemed to be irreconcilable. Whereas some Fathers asserted the validity and usefulness of the *schema,* others asked for it to be withdrawn and radically altered.[2] After six days the somewhat heated debate on this ground to a halt and an order of the day was put to the vote, proposing that the discussion should be suspended and the *schema* returned to the Commission. This proposal however did not succeed in winning the approval of the prescribed majority of two-thirds. Out of 2,000 votes those in favour were 103 short of the necessary majority. So the situation seemed even worse than before and the Council was apparently up a blind alley: for purely formal reasons (that is, the failure to attain two-thirds of the votes) the majority were defeated by the minority and the debate might have continued indefinitely without ever reaching any conclusion. Then it was that Pope John XXIII intervened, entrusting the re-elaboration of the *schema* to a mixed Commission, composed of the Commission for

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[1] We shall make no attempt here to recount the vicissitudes of this document, for they are amply recorded in the various commentaries listed in the bibliography. We shall merely refer to a few points which are of major significance in assessing the significance of the document.

[2] For my own part I felt obliged to declare, 14 November 1962, that I could not approve of the *schema* under discussion, and that, as it did not correspond to the pastoral aims of the Council, it should be entirely revised and re-written (*funditus retractetur*).

Doctrine, the Secretariat for Christian Unity, and some other members specially appointed by the Holy Father. Guiding principles for the work of this mixed Commission were laid down by the Holy Father himself.

(2) The work of this mixed Commission and the further elaboration of the document meant a great deal of laborious effort by the Council Fathers and long drawn-out discussions, but all this labour was to bear its fruit. When, during the third Session, the document re-appeared before the General Assembly in its new form, it met with general approval.[3] After further modifications made during the third and fourth Sessions the document was presented for final approval in the General Assembly (previous to the public Congregation) on 29 October 1963, and won more than two thousand favourable votes with only twenty-seven 'against'. The secrecy observed in the ballot and the laborious preparation of the document prove that the unanimity reached in the final voting (in the public Congregation) was no artificially contrived result but the fruit of a mature growth. This unanimity obviously does not imply that the Council fathers were, or are, in agreement on all the questions connected with this great and difficult theme, but rather that they were unanimous in accepting a text which was inspired by the pastoral purpose of the Council and which told modern men, indeed all men, what is was necessary to tell them about the essential doctrine on this matter.

(3) We must however add that although we acknowledge the great and patient labours of men, the unanimity achieved was truly the work of the Holy Spirit. This was clearly evident throughout all the events and vicissitudes in which the document was involved before final unanimous agreement was reached. The work of the divine Spirit which animates and rules the Church is all the more evident in the case we are considering in as much as the final result was quite unforeseen and

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[3] I myself very willingly declared, 6 October 1964, that on the whole I was satisfied with the *schema*; I pointed out that it had various praiseworthy qualities which it was absolutely necessary to preserve.

agreement particularly difficult to achieve after so long and complicated a preparation.

The purpose and method of our commentary: for whom is it intended?

Our intention is obviously to emphasize the precious content of this document, and to point out what may be described as the particular and characteristic method it employs to expound the great theme of the word of God.

(1) One of the chief characteristics of this Constitution is its eminently pastoral intention. The Council did not propose—as had quite rightly been proposed by so many other Councils—to resolve this or that controversy, or to condemn this or that error against the faith. It declares its purpose when it asserts that it 'wishes to set forth authentic teaching about divine revelation and about how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, and by believing may hope, and by hoping may love' (no. 1). In this sense the Council speaks not only to the Catholic faithful, not only to all Christians, but to the world at large, that is, to all men, because divine revelation is intended for each and all. The present volume seeks to further this same lofty purpose, so clearly defined above. One of the consequences of such a broad scope is that it is addressed not solely and specifically to specialists but to all educated people, so that through them the thought of the Council may gradually be disseminated more widely. Therefore, in order to be understood by the educated general reader, we have discarded the highly specialized approach of the theological schools, their technical language and their displays of learning. Such things are hardly comprehensible, let alone useful, to the non-specialists for whom this book is primarily intended.[4]

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[4] For the same reason we do not attempt to follow the evolution of the text, through a process of modifications, corrections, proposals and counter proposals. We shall only refer to this aspect of the document in a few rare cases, where such references are necessary for a more precise understanding of the text.

(2) Another characteristic of the Constitution is its care to show as far as is possible the final basic justification for the doctrines put forward, and particularly the justification from Holy Scripture. This method is of very special importance for the cause of Christian unity. In fact, on the one hand it is true, as the Council *Decree on Ecumenism* asserts, that 'in dialogue itself (with non-Catholic Christians), the sacred writings are precious instruments in the mighty hand of God for attaining that unity which the Saviour offers to all men' (no. 21). On the other hand we must not forget the painful truth which the Decree itself points out in the same context with regard to the divergences which exist in this field: 'But when Christians separated from us affirm the divine authority of the sacred books, they think differently from the way we do—and with diversity even among themselves—about the relationship between the Scriptures and the Church. In the Church, according to Catholic belief, an authentic teaching office plays a special role in the explanation and proclamation of the written word of God' (*ibid.*).

Therefore in order to point out what we have in common with non-Catholic Christians and what still separates us from them (the doctrine on the imporance of the teaching office and on tradition) it is necessary on the one hand to indicate the scriptural foundations of the various points of doctrine and, on the other hand and at the same time, to explain the essential function of live preaching and of sacred tradition. The *Constitution on Divine Revelation* has tried to meet both these requirements. Our present volume will then try to study, more closely than was possible in a Conciliar document, the scriptural bases for the doctrine set forward in our Constitution and at the same time seek to expound and justify the irreplaceable function of sacred tradition.

(3) Now that we have defined the purpose of this study we may proceed to indicate the type of reader to whom we address our words. As this is a commentary on a conciliar document it is obvious that the book must primarily interest Catholic Christians, who are bound to acknowledge the doctrinal authority of the Council and so to accept completely the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*. But we may legitimately hope that the book may also interest some of our non-Catholic Christian brothers. This is, as we have already said, a problem and a sphere of interest very widely shared. We shall therefore try to treat the material in such a way as to make it, as far as lies within our power, intelligible also to these brothers of ours. Moreover, even on those points where they will disagree with the thought of the Constitution and of our commentary, it is nevertheless important for them to get to know it and to study it in the light of Christ's teaching with a great love of the truth, with humility and charity—as we have tried to do in the present study.

We hope that the book will be read also by non-Christians and unbelievers in the new spirit of mutual interest and at least human *rapprochement* and dialogue which is more and more noticeable in human relationships and was one of the great aims of the Second Vatican Council. This spirit has found its authoritative expression in the encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, which is mainly intended to expound and promote the method of dialogue. At this point in the history of mankind when 'every day men are being drawn closer together and the ties between various peoples are being multiplied' (*Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, no. 1), all who love mankind and seek the good of men must be willing to listen to others, especially when it is a question of mankind's greatest treasures, among which must be numbered —even independently of its dogmatic content—the Christian gospel, and in particular its presentation in written form in the Bible.

As World War II burst so terribly on the world, Pius XII was writing in his encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*: 'At the root of this process, which leads to the spiritual and moral destitution of these present times are those who have tried to dethrone Christ, and to turn men away from the law of truth which he proclaimed, and from the law of love which is the life-giving inspiration of his Kingdom. The recognition of the royal claims of Christ, and the return of individuals and of human societies to the law of his truth and love are the only way of salvation.'[5]

The Constitution we are studying, and our own commentary upon it, has no other purpose but that of leading mankind to these divine sources of life, and above all to Christ in whom is centred the whole revelation of God to men. For, as the Constitution says: '. . . through his whole work of making himself present and revealing himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final gift to men of the Spirit of truth . . . he confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed: that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise up up to life eternal' (no. 4).

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[5] Cf. *Discorsi Radiomessaggi di Pio XII*, vol. III, 441, Vatican City 1955.

2 | God reveals himself

'In his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature' (no. 2). With these words, so rich in significance, the Council indicates the essential elements of the theme of which it is about to speak, and the divine purpose of that wonderful relationship between God and man effected by the divine will through God's revelation of himself. The Constitution explains that this revelation was prompted by God's benevolence and wisdom and that his purpose was to enable man to share in the divine life. Finally, it speaks of the universal Mediator, Christ, the Word made flesh. These brief references suffice to convince us that here we are dealing with the very essence of Christianity, and also that this is a fact, or rather a process, of infinite complexity. In order to be understood it must be explained and illustrated at length.

Generally speaking, what are the problems arising from such an extraordinary divine intervention? First of all we must ask what this revelation of God is and how it is manifested; then we must see how and when the revelation actually occurred in the life and history of men, and above all what is the particular function of Christ as Mediator; finally, considering revelation from the point of view of men, we must ask in what way the individual man may personally receive this manifestation of God, and also what connection it has with that knowledge of God which he may acquire by considering the works of our Creator.

The Council answers these questions first of all by expounding in general terms what God's revelation of himself means to mankind in all its various aspects (no. 2); then it gradually explains the process of revelation in history until the coming of Christ (no. 3); so we come to the revelation of God in Christ, the way in which this came about and its final and everlasting significance (no. 4); finally, the document describes the gradual process by which man enters into a relationship with God who reveals himself, the character of this *rapprochement* between man and God, its necessary conditions and its growth (nos. 5-7).

As we have seen, this first chapter of the Constitution explains, in a few pages, the very essence of Christianity, and in so doing guides us through a vast field of doctrine to which theologians have devoted much study. The explanation must be given under three headings: general considerations on revelation (no. 2), the history of salvation (nos. 3 and 4) and finally man's response to God's revelation of himself (no. 5).

Concerning the theme of our present chapter, the general consideration of divine revelation, the Council first expounds the immediate object of revelation, its final purpose, the general means by which God reveals himself, and finally the position occupied by Christ.

The immediate object of revelation is that hidden purpose of the will of God which is his plan for the salvation of mankind in Christ. The expression 'purpose of his will' is taken from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians and must be considered in the light of the whole letter which is full of sublime beauty and wisdom. The apostle began by expressing his adoration of the Father's design: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him'. Then, having referred to the gift of the redemption and the forgiveness of sins, the apostle went on: 'For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph. 1:9). It is his

great design for the unity of the human family, indeed, for the unity of all creation, in Christ the God-Man . Although the Constitution borrows from the pauline text only this one expression about the mystery of God's will—which is after all the central point—it treats the whole subject on the plane of all mankind, or rather, of the whole created world.

The Constitution then speaks of two spiritual benefits which man receives from this work of revelation: 'access to the Father in the Holy Spirit' and 'participation in the divine nature'. The expression 'access in one Spirit to the Father', occurs in the letter to the Ephesians (2:18) and signifies the reconciliation of sinful man to God, by the power of Christ's redemption, through which man is once more admitted to the presence of his heavenly Father. This expression, together with the reference to participation in the divine nature, shows that this does not mean man's original access to God, i.e. the knowledge of God acquired in the light of reason, but an access which is the fruit of redemption. In fact, we know that Scripture clearly and categorically affirms that man may know God, and so have some 'access' to him, also, through a study of the created world. This doctrine is emphasized at the end of the chapter we are now considering; for psychological reasons, however, and for a better understanding of the nature of revelation, we think it best to give its explanation here and now.

God may be known through his creation

Wishing to explain the plan of divine revelation from the point of view of man's reasoning faculty, the Council first of all states positively: 'Through divine revelation God chose to set forth and reveal himself and the eternal decisions of his will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, he chose 'to share those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind'' (no. 6).[1] Then, continuing the words of the First Vatican Council, it asserts that ' "God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason" (cf. Rom. 1:20)' (*ibid.*). This affirmation of the Council serves on the one hand as an introduction to that which follows, that is, the assertion that even in this sphere of the natural knowledge of God divine revelation makes its own contribution by coming to the aid of our human faculties which are impaired by original sin; on the other hand it serves to assert the negative aspect, that is, that revelation is not absolutely indispensable for the natural knowledge of God.

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[1] The Council is here quoting the words of the First Vatican Council, 'On Revelation', *Denz.*, 1786 (3005).

Let us now consider the assertion that man is able to know God by using his reasoning powers. This is of fundamental importance. In fact, just as it is necessary to accept revelation and acknowledge its necessity, in order that man may achieve his supernatural aim, participation in the divine life in Christ, so also it would be a mistake to assert that without revelation man is incapable of acquiring any knowledge of God. This would be the error of those who claimed that man's nature was entirely corrupted by original sin and therefore rendered incapable of good, and naturally still more incapable of the knowledge of God. It would be the error also of various forms of modern agnosticism which deny man's capacity to transcend the world of experience and in so doing acquire any knowledge of the transcendental world, that is, of God.

The Council, like Vatican I, cannot accept these positions, although it acknowledges that they may have a certain foundation, in the sense that by original sin man's nature was, as the theologicans say, 'wounded'. As a consequence of this, even man's power to acquire the knowledge of God by the light of natural human reason, which is possible in itself, has been weakened and can succeed only with difficulty. Therefore, says the Council, one must also attribute to divine revelation the merit of coming to the assistance of man's natural powers; in fact, as Vatican I had already declared, 'those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can through his revelation be known by all men with ease, with firm certitude and with no trace of error, even in the present state of the human race' (no. 6).

However, although it admits this limitation, this impaired ability and certainty, in acquiring the natural knowledge of God, the Constitution firmly and clearly upholds the doctrine that man is in fact able to know God through natural human reason.

(1) We must add that this doctrine is the only one which corresponds to the explicit teaching of Scripture. Let us begin with the classical quotation from St Paul's letter to the Romans, in which he speaks of the guilt of the non-Christian world of his own days: 'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them' (Rom. 1:19). And remember that here, as we see from the context, St Paul is not speaking of revelation. 'God has shown it to them' is a biblical way of speaking, meaning that God has made it possible for them to attain this knowledge. In fact St Paul knows that revelation was the exclusive privilege of the chosen people of the Old Testament, as it was later on of the chosen people of the New. Indeed, he went on to speak of the knowledge that had existed 'ever since the creation of the world', and that is acquired by reflecting upon created things: 'Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made' (*ibid.*, v. 20). And so the apostle concludes, concerning the religious practices of these non-Christians: 'So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened' (*ibid.*, et seq.), that is, they fell into idolatry: 'Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles' (*ibid.*, vv. 22, 23). Note that the apostle is not speaking of a profound speculative knowledge of God, but of practical knowledge of the 'eternal power and divinity', and of the duties incumbent upon man because of this knowledge, in other words, of a knowledge which is the justification for worshipping

God. This is the same thought which the Council expressed when it declared that God may be known as the 'beginning and end of all things' (no. 6).

(2) St Paul's teaching is in line with the numerous illustrations and explanations of this subject in the Book of Wisdom, which was written about two centuries before his time. The writer says very significantly: 'For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature, and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world' (Wisdom 13:1-2). It is true that these words, especially those at the beginning of the quotation, are not likely to please our modern taste. But the same language was to be used by St Paul and was intended simply to assert most forcefully the evidence of truth. The author gives as the reason for this assertion: 'If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator' (*ibid.*, 13:3-5). In these final words we have exactly the same principle which formed the starting point of St Paul's argument. We may add that further on the same writer tries to show some understanding of those erring minds which did not succeed in attaining a knowledge of God: 'Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful' (*ibid.*, vv. 6 and 7). But at the last they must frankly admit their guilt: 'Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?' (*ibid.*, vv. 8 and 9). This is another way of expressing the idea that, in a certain sense, it is easier to know God than to understand creation, because the existence of God is more obvious. The author adds that even more blameworthy than those who worship the forces of nature are those who worship worthless idols, which they have made with their own hands: 'But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are the men who give the name 'Gods' to the work of men's hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill, and likenesses of animals, or a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand' (*ibid.*, 10; see also Psalms 18 [19]: 2-4; 8:3-4; 13 [14]: 1; Is. 40:26).

These then are the foundations in Holy Scripture for the Council's affirmation that 'God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason.' Now, against the background of this effective and natural human capacity to know God (even if, as we have seen, it is often blunted or even distorted as a result of original sin) shines this divine gift, God's revelation of himself to mankind. Contrasted with knowledge which is often uncertain and mingled with error, we have in divine revelation the gift of a knowledge of God which bears us aloft as if on eagle's wings, to enable us to know God's secret purposes and the mystery of his will, intent on the salvation of all men.

Men are made to share in the divine nature

The Constitution describes the nature and purpose of God's revelation to mankind in two successive passages. In the former it underlines the benefit to man, which seems, at least at first sight, to be purely objective and impersonal: he is given access to God and enabled to share in the divine nature; in the second, instead, the Council points out that God treats men in a very personal manner, as friends, and invites them to enter into communion with himself.[2]

[2] Cf. Bea, *The Church and Mankind*, Chapman, London, 1967, chap. II 'In the family of God'; chap. III 'The mystery of the people of God'.

In order to explain this first benefit which man receives, let us begin with the conception of his 'access to the Father in the Holy Spirit'. This expression is taken from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians. After having explained the work of redemption, achieved through the sacrificial death of Christ, by means of which he reconciled both Hebrews and 'Gentiles' (the non-Hebrew peoples) with God (cf. Eph. 2:13-16), the apostle goes on to say that Christ came to preach this reconciliation to men, 'to preach peace to you which were far off [non-Hebrews] and peace to those who were near [Israelites]; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father' (*ibid.,* 2:17). As we see, the same expression is used in the Council document. The meaning of this reconciliation with God is more fully explained in the letter to the Romans, where St Paul again speaks of this 'peace', saying: 'Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand...' (Rom. 5:1-2). Instead of speaking of 'access to God' as in the letter to the Ephesians, here he speaks of 'access to this grace', that is, the gift of redemption and salvation, and of being at peace with God, which results from this. Later on the apostle was to show that this salvation means the reconciliation of sinful man with God, which enables man to be at peace with his Creator and have access to him: 'But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since therefore we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For, if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life' (*ibid.,* 5:8-10).

Another aspect of the infinite gift which we are able to receive through God's revelation of himself is that by means of this gift men are enabled to share in the divine nature.[3] The expression is taken from the second letter of St Peter, wherein he speaks of the gifts his readers have received from God: 'His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature' (II Peter 1:3-4).

This profound truth is fully expounded in other writings of the New Testament. St John affirms that all who believe in Christ's name receive the grace of being born of God, 'not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God'.[4]

This 'sonship by adoption' is to be distinguished from the divine natural sonship which belonged to the Word alone, but this infinite gift is not to be conceived merely as a juridical and affective relationship between God and man; it signifies a true spiritual transformation which enables man to become more like God, in a way that would be beyond the power of human nature, or of any created nature, and so is called 'supernatural'.

Through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit

In the passage we have already quoted from the Council documents two other important considerations have been evident: the functions which, in this sublime ennoblement of man, belong respectively to Christ and to the Holy Spirit. These functions are described in the Constitution when it says that men are granted access to the Father and participation in the divine nature 'through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit'. These two elements enable us to understand more profoundly the mystery of the spiritualization of man, and therefore the mystery of God's will that all men shall be saved.

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[3] Remember that this is but another aspect of the same gift of God brought to us by Christ. Therefore the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity,* in explaining God's intention to make peace with men, at once defines this concept of peace as 'communion between sinful human beings and himself . . . ' (no. 3).

[4] Cf. John 1:13; therefore St John speaks of Christians as sons, in Greek, *tekna,* that is, 'born' of God; cf. John 11:52; I John 3:1-2; 5:2; Rom. 8:16, 21; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:15.

(1) Let us first consider the role and work of Christ. For a profound understanding of the doctrine concerning Christ's position we are indebted above all to St Paul. He sees all men and their supernatural life so bound up in Christ that he uses that characteristic and deeply moving expression 'in Christ' which occurs more than five hundred times in his letters. To give some examples of this let us turn first to the sublime introduction to the letter to the Ephesians. After addressing himself to his readers and greeting them, St Paul begins with what might be called a hymn of thanks to God for all that he has done 'in Christ' for us: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.' The words which follow directly concern the point emphasized by the Council, namely, that God has destined us to become his adopted sons *through* Jesus Christ: 'He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.' Then comes the solemn fulfilment of God's purpose, this also through Christ alone: 'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he has lavished upon us . . . in all wisdom and insight.' Moreover, in the text which we have already quoted at the beginning of this chapter, we find the conception that not only this or that but *all* created things are united in Christ: 'For he has made known to us . . . the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.' In Christ we become also heirs of God: 'In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things, according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.' Finally, in Christ we are also signed with the seal of the Holy Spirit: 'In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory' (Eph. 1:3-14).

(a) St Paul describes our participation in the divine nature as participation in the sonship of God's Son; God, he says, predestined us 'to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren' (Rom. 8:29), that is, the first-born of a numerous family. And Christ, by coming into this world, has given 'to all who received him . . . power to become children of God' (John 1:12). This means that it was he who enabled them to be born of God by grace, as he was born of divine nature. Like him, the 'only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father' (Creed), so they too receive the gift of being born of God by grace, as we have already shown (cf. above, p. 33).

(b) Let us remember also that we do not receive all these immense benefits simply through the word, but through Christ, that is, the Word made flesh. In fact, the word brings about our birth from God only by means of the Incarnation. By assuming human nature, Christ bound to himself with supernatural bonds all mankind in one single family, says the Council *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (cf. no. 8). Only through this solidarity and because Christ is the head of regenerated mankind, does he communicate to men the divine life. 'Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (II Cor. 8:9); he consented to be born of a woman so that he might 'redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons' (Gal. 4:4 et seq.); the Son of God, the Word, 'became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14) so that from then onwards 'the whole fulness of deity' might remain with men (cf. Col. 2:9).

Note in all these texts the connection between the mystery of the Incarnation and the gift of divine life to men. The same thought occurs repeatedly also in the Council documents: 'In the human nature which he united to himself, the Son of God redeemed man and transformed him into a new creation' (*Church*, no. 7). This is because Christ, ' "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), is himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam he restored the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as he assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity for us too. For by his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice, and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin' (*Modern World*, no. 22).

(2) Both access to the Father and participation in the divine nature are given us in the Holy Spirit, as well as 'in Christ'. We have already (p. 32) referred to St Paul's words in the letter to the Ephesians about 'access to the Father in the Holy Spirit' (cf. Eph. 2:18). Similarly, participation in the divine nature through regeneration, through a 'new birth', is also brought about 'in the Spirit', that is by the operation of the Holy Spirit. This is most clearly proved by the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, when he told him that in order to enter the Kingdom of heaven we need the assistance of the life-giving Spirit of God, because 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit' (John 3:6). Since 'God is spirit' (John 4:24), as Jesus told the Samaritan woman, so the Spirit of God himself is needed to transform man so profoundly as to enable him through grace to share in the spiritual nature of God. That is why St Paul, speaking of the regeneration of man in baptism, says that God has saved us 'by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour' (Titus 3:5-6).

In conclusion, what we have said about the Constitution's affirmation that men have access to the Father and are made sharers of his divine nature 'through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit', helps us to understand that this participation in the divine nature and life truly enables man to enter into the secret life of the Holy Trinity itself, and so into communion with the divine Persons, as we shall explain later.

The invisible God

Up to this point the Constitution has been expounding the benefits to man (access to God and a sharing in the divine nature) which are derived from God's will that all men shall be saved. Now it goes on to reflect upon the way in which God effects this revelation of himself to men: 'Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15; I Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Baruch 3:38), so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself' (no. 2). So we learn two essential truths, first of all that God, although invisible, condescends to speak with men as friends, and then that he invites and admits them into communion with himself. Let us reflect upon these truths in this order, beginning with the 'invisibility' of God. In fact, the more we wonder at the loving kindness of God, the more aware we become of his invisibility, that is, of the infinite distance which separates God from men. It is particularly necessary to insist on this because what we have said till now about the benefits brought to man by revelation may sometimes, through force of habit, seem to us very natural and obvious. So the Constitution reminds us that these benefits are 'divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind' (no. 6). And it is this notion of the invisibility of God which makes us clearly understand this affirmation.

(1) What does this 'invisibility' mean? It is a characteristically biblical way of expressing a truth which is repeatedly stated—using this very term—in both the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament this truth is at the centre of a profound mystical experience of the great lawgiver of the

chosen people. In the Book of Exodus the chronicler tells us with wonderful simplicity that 'the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend' (33:11). This means that the same God who upon Sinai had shown himself to his chosen people in thunder and lightning, so that they cried to Moses in terror: 'You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die' (Exodus 20:19), spoke to Moses 'face to face, as man speaks to his friend'. Conscious of this supreme favour shown to him by God, Moses dared to beg of him: 'I pray thee, show me thy glory!' For his friend God did all he could: 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name, "The Lord", and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy', but he could not let him see his face: 'You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live' (Exodus 33:18-20).

(2) It is true that this passage from Exodus does not actually constitute a proof of the 'invisibility' of God. But it shows the infinite distance that separates God from man, and so forms an introduction to a whole series of passages in the New Testament which speak of this invisibility. St Paul calls God the 'king of ages, immortal, invisible . . .' (I Tim. 1:17), and explains this invocation more precisely when he speaks of God 'who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see' (*ibid.*, 6:16). The evangelist St John says the same: 'No man has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known' (John 1:18; cf. I John 4:12). Therefore St Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians that Christ is 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15). And St John reports Christ's words 'everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me' followed immediately, as if to forestall any misunderstanding, by the words 'not that any one has seen the Father' (*ibid.*, 6:46-47). In his profound revelation of himself, reported by St Matthew, Jesus says: 'All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matt. 11:27).

(3) The biblical truth that God dwells in inaccessible light and is invisible is therefore valid not only for the Old Testament, which was still imperfect, but also for the New. Obviously it does not and could not mean that God is unknowable. In fact we have already seen that according to Scripture God is the beginning and end of all things, and may be discovered by the human reason through the consideration of created things. The concept of the invisibility of God expresses the infinite distance between the divine nature and our human nature, by reason of which it is impossible for us to 'see' God. That is why our Constitution, using the words of Vatican I, affirms that the divine benefits bestowed upon us through divine revelation 'transcend the understanding of the human mind' (no. 6).

Indeed, we may add that even with the help of these supernatural gifts in our present life, as long as man walks by faith and not by sight (cf. II Cor. 5:7), he cannot pass over this great divide. St Paul, speaking of the Christian still clothed in mortal flesh, states most emphatically: 'I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable' (I Cor. 15:50). While a man shares our weak human nature (our 'flesh and blood'), he cannot have a share in the Kingdom of God, that is, the heavenly vision of God. The apostle is so convinced of this that he deduces from it the necessity of a new radical transformation of this human nature—over and above the transformation effected by water through the power of the Holy Spirit—before man can see God: 'For . . . this mortal nature must put on immortality' (*ibid.*, v. 53), a transformation which will take place when all the children of God are revealed, in the 'glorious liberty of the sons of God' (Rom. 8:19, 21). We are indeed already children of God, but it is not yet clear what we shall be (cf. I John 3:2). This revelation and transformation will take place at the time of the resurrection of the dead, as the apostle explains, using the metaphor of the seed that is buried in the ground: 'What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body' (I Cor. 15:42-43). In fact, if it is true that 'God is spirit' (John 4:24), then in order to see him we must become like him, as the apostle John says: 'We know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (I John 3:2), whereas 'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood [by God]' (I Cor. 13:12).

(4) The invisibility of God which we have been explaining enables us to understand why in Scripture, and especially in the New Testament, everything about God, his life, his purpose etc., is conceived and thought of as something secret and mysterious, which may be known only if God reveals it to us, that is, either in a spiritual manner or by some appearance in history. Hence the characteristic biblical conception of 'revelation' (in Greek either the verb *apokalypto* or the noun *apokalypsis*).

It is important to form a clear idea of what we mean by 'revelation'. It is true that, according to Scripture, it is possible for man to attain some knowledge of God and of 'his eternal power and deity' (cf. Rom. 1:20-21 and see above, p. 28) from a consideration of created things. But this knowledge is unsufficient, chiefly because it tells man nothing about God's plan for salvation, and of the treasures which he has prepared for men, which 'no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived' (I Cor. 2:9), or about the coming and Incarnation of Christ, etc. We come to know these and other similar truths only because God has revealed them to us. 'For he has made known to us . . . the mystery of his will, according to his purpose . . . to unite all things in Christ' (Eph. 1:9-10; cf. Rom. 16:25; I Cor. 2:10; I Peter 1:5); 'the mystery of Christ . . . was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit' (Eph. 3:4-5). Moreover, Jesus told Peter that it was his Father in heaven who had revealed to him that he, Christ, was the Son of the living God (cf. Matt. 16:17-18) and he gave thanks to his Father for having revealed the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven to the simple hearted. He added: 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matt. 11:25-27; cf. Luke 10:22). Hence the title of the *Constitution on Divine Revelation,* the subject of which is indicated from the beginning of the document: 'In his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will . . .' (no. 2). And the purpose of God's revelation of himself is explained a little further on: 'Through divine revelation God chose to show forth and communicate himself and the eternal decisions of his will regarding the salvation of men . . . "to share those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind"' (Vatican I, *Dogmatic Const. on Cath. Faith,* chap. 2 'On Revelation': *Denz.* 1786 [3005]). So we are told that even revealed truths are still beyond man's comprehension. We know that God grants us these sublime gifts, and we understand, or rather dimly perceive, some aspects of them, but we shall not fully comprehend them until we see God himself as he really is.

God treats men as friends

Serious reflection on the invisibility and essential inaccessibility of God reveals to us his infinite goodness to men, for notwithstanding this unbridgable distance between God and men, he deigns to speak with them as with friends, and to hold converse with them.

(1) The fact that God reveals himself by speaking gives rise to those biblical expressions—'revelation' and 'word of God'—which the Constitution also uses. They signify the same thing. For, as we have shown in the previous chapter the Constitution uses both terms in the same sense. In that chapter we showed that in the New Testament also the term 'word of God' is used

not only to describe the *written* word of God but also to denote the preaching of the word of God. Now we see that these expressions are fully justified. Even when the gospel is preached and transmitted only by word of mouth it can legitimately be called the 'word of God', because God revealed himself speaking to men and holding converse with them, by means of the prophets and finally by his own Son (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). Therefore, although it is true that Scripture is *formally* the word of God—being written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and having God as its author—nevertheless the message of revelation which is imparted by preaching may also claim to be the 'word of God' because it is truly that which God communicated to men in speech.

(2) God speaks to men as if they were his friends. When the notion appears for the first time in Scripture that a man may be considered and treated by God as a friend, this is thought to be a great and exceptional privilege. Abraham is twice called the 'friend' of God.[5] Then the conception is broadened so that the psalmist may speak in the plural of the 'friends' of God, but here the term is used in a less intimate sense than that in which Isaiah uses it (Is. 41:8; cf. also Exodus 33:11); in the same sense the author of the Book of Wisdom says that Wisdom makes men 'friends of God, and prophets' (Wisdom 7:27).

In the New Testament Jesus, when speaking of the persecutions and dangers to which his disciples will be exposed, warns them: 'I tell you, my friends [*philois*], do not fear those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do' (Luke 12:4). At the Last Supper he said to his apostles: 'You are my friends [*philoi*] if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you' (John 15:14-15). Obviously these words which St Luke records are valid for all Christ's disciples, because all may find themselves in the situation of which Christ speaks. Nor do the words recorded by St John refer to an exclusive privilege enjoyed by these first apostles. The assurance given by Jesus, that he had taught them all that he had heard from the Father, is valid for all his disciples. What Jesus said to his first apostles he said, through them, to all his disciples throughout time.

Moreover, the idea that a man is a friend of God expresses less intimacy than the idea of being his son. So the thought of God being a friend to man should not cause us much surprise. The importance of the idea is that it illustrates the profound generosity of God to man from a different point of view. To say that a man is the son of God obviously suggests a closer intimacy than to say that he is his friend; but in the filial bond there is a relationship of superiority (the father is, by virtue of his fatherhood, superior to the son), whereas this is not so in the case of friendship. Friendship implies affection between equals.

So the idea of friendship between God and man expresses more clearly the generosity of God, who stoops to treat man as an equal. This is the new and characteristic element of the text in which God presents himself as the friend of man.

As regards the actual manner in which God treats men as friends, we must first of all note that in Christ were seen the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour (cf. Titus 3:4); hence his profoundly human behaviour towards men. The gospels tell us that he even became a 'friend' of publicans and sinners (Matt. 11:19). God showed his generosity also in 'inspiring' certain human authors, so that he was able through their writings to speak to men in a perfectly human way in Scripture. We shall return to this divine generosity later on.

In order to indicate the motive and final explanation of this condescension on God's part the Constitution says that God did all this out of his 'great love' for man. This is in fact the only explanation for God's dealings with man and is expressed in the Council *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, which says that the divine plan for man's salvation 'flows from that "fountain of love", that is, the charity of God the Father. From him, who is the "origin without origin", the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son. Freely creating us out of his surpassing and merciful kindness, and graciously calling us moreover to communicate in life and glory with himself, he has generously poured out his divine goodness and does not cease to do so. Thus he who made all things may at last be "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28)' (no. 2). We shall return to this theme of the divine love for men, when we speak of the 'communion' between God and men.

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[5] Is. 41:8; there is used here a word which signifies 'loved' by God; cf. also James 2:13.

Towards 'communion with God'

It is undoubtedly incomparable and sublime generosity on God's part to speak with men as with friends, and to visit them. And yet it is only a means to something much greater. God is not content to visit us from time to time—he wishes to bring about a permanent communion of life. What is this 'fellowship' or 'communion' with God?

(1) We have already come across this concept in the prologue to the Constitution, which quotes from the first letter of St John. There the apostle tells us that he wishes to preach about the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to men 'so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (I John 2-3).[6] The Greek term which, in the original text, corresponds to our 'fellowship' or 'communion' is *koinonia*, which primarily denotes community of possession or of activity (for example, in the exercise of a profession); in a broader sense it denotes kinship, community in individual matters and in life in general. It is used in this last sense in the religious language of the New Testament. According to St Paul, Christians in the Eucharist enjoy 'participation' (*koinonia*) in the Blood and Body of Christ (cf. I Cor. 10:16); indeed St Paul says that the Christian vocation itself means being called to 'fellowship' (*koinonia*) with Christ (cf. I Cor. 1:9), which implies also the 'fellowship' of the Holy Spirit (cf. II Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1), and also a sharing in the suffering of Christ (cf. Phil. 3:10). We know that according to St Paul the vital and organic union of the baptized with Christ is so close and intimate that a Christian can say: 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20).

This is the best interpretation we have of St John's thought, and his words to some extent explain themselves. In fact, the apostle communicates to his readers his own faith in Christ, who is eternal life revealed to men (cf. I John, 1-2) in order to enable them to share in this great gift. He explains that he himself lives in this fellowship with the Father and the Son. Whoever believes in Christ already has eternal life (cf. John 5:24). And eternal life consists in this, said Jesus, when he prayed to his Father at the Last Supper, 'that they know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3).

This communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ is then simply man's spiritual and supernatural participation in the divine life. This begins at baptism, which, through faith, brings about a sharing in the divine nature and the bestowal of divine sonship in the gift of the Holy Spirit, with a resultant community of possessions and of life.

Members of the family and people of God

To conclude our account of God's saving purpose for mankind, let us add a final important explanation. The Constitution lays special emphasis on what the divine will gives to individual men, that is, access to the Father in the Holy Spirit, participation in the divine nature and fellowship with God. But we must never forget that all this is part of the 'mystery of God's will' for our salvation, which constitutes the starting point of the Constitution. Now this expression, taken from the letter to the Ephesians, refers to God's general purpose of 'uniting' all things in Christ, that is, to a purpose concerning the whole human family. All these gifts are bestowed on individual men, but always in the context of God's over-all plan for the whole human family. It is most important to point out in our explanation of the Constitution that this social aspect of man's salvation is implicit in the whole structure of this document. The man of today, after the individualistic education he has received, is too often inclined to interpret his relationship to God in an individualistic way. However, as modern man is also becoming increasingly aware of social realities, it is well that these realities should be given their proper place in the religious field. It is in this sense that people now frequently speak of the 'rediscovery' of the Church by the Christians of our own time. It is therefore necessary to understand that divine revelation shows us this social aspect of our religious life as well, and teaches us to consider our whole Christian life from the point of view of members of the Church—the people of God. It is true that the Constitution speaks of 'men' and not of mankind, but it does so to point out that God does indeed think of every man individually because salvation depends on everyone's personal decision. This way of speaking must not make us forget that God sees these individual men as part of this general plan for 'uniting' the whole human family in Christ.

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[6] I John 1:2-3; the Constitution has used the text of the Vulgate whereas we have followed the original Greek. But this is merely a difference of form, the basic meaning remains the same.

The social side of the Christian's vocation, that is, his essential union with the 'family' and 'people' of God, is amply illustrated in the New Testament. St Paul writes to the Ephesians: 'So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19). In the first letter to Timothy he speaks of the Church as the 'household of God' (I Tim. 3:15) that is, the company of those who dwell in the same house and are members of the same family. In this sense the word 'house' is used also in the following passages: in the letter to the Hebrews Christ is compared to Moses who was faithful in God's house as a servant, whereas 'Christ was faithful over God's house as a Son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope' (I Heb. 3:6). In this sense the Church considers herself as the family of God, and in the liturgy speaks to God about herself as 'thy family'.[7]

Therefore, although the Constitution speaks of the effect of God's self revelation on individuals (in order, as we have said, to emphasize that salvation comes through a personal decision) it does not and could not isolate individuals from God's general plan for the whole human family, for it is within this framework that the individual receives grace and finds salvation. And the salvation of the individual has a beneficial effect on the whole human family and plays an essential part in the realization of God's supreme design for all mankind.

The means: deeds and words

Having spoken of divine revelation from the point of view of its purposes and benefits for mankind, the Council proceeds to indicate the means by which God reveals himself to men and works out his purpose for them. This is a very important subject because it offers us—in a few words—the basic principles for the precise and profound interpretation of God's self-revelation throughout the many steps by which, in the course of history, he has gradually made himself known to men. Only by means of this study can we understand the profound meaning of his revelation and all that, through his various manifestations, God wishes to teach mankind. The passage in question is very brief: 'This plan of revelation[8] is realized by deeds and words which have an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them' (no. 2).

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[7] This is especially true of the ancient liturgical texts, for example those for Lent: cf. Monday and Saturday after the 2nd Sunday of Lent; 1st Sunday of Passiontide; post communion of 2nd Mass of Christmas; prayer of 5th Sunday after Epiphany; the prayer 'Hanc igitur' of the Canon, etc. Let us mention in passing that this social aspect is much emphasized in the Conciliar documents. The *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* states: 'But God did not wish to call men to share his life merely as individuals without any mutual bonds. Rather, he wishes to mould them into a people in which his sons, once dispersed, may be gathered together (cf. John 11:52)' (*Missions*, no. 2; cf. also *Church*, no. 9). Another way in which the Conciliar documents show this social aspect of the salvation of man is in the concept of the 'family of God'. The very fact that men become the sons of God means that they form a family of brothers, the family of God. Therefore the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* says that Christ 'commanded his apostles to preach to all peoples the gospel message, so that the human race might become the family of God, in which love would be the fulfilment of the law' (no. 32). The Church is 'composed of men, that is, of citizens of the earthly city who are called to form the family of God's children during the present history of the human race, and to keep increasing it until the Lord returns' (*ibid.*, no. 40; cf. *ibid.*, no. 42). So the Church's function is to 'save and renew every creature, so that all things may be restored in Christ, and in him mankind may form one family and one people' (*Missions*, no. 1).

(1) The new element in this passage is the Council's assertion that God reveals himself not only by words but also by actions and deeds. Until now in manuals of theology divine revelation was generally defined as 'God's word to man'. Consequently, the deeds were taken into account only in so far as they proved the authenticity of the prophet, God's messenger, and therefore were indirectly a confirmation of the message he delivered. Much of the profound meaning to be found in the works of God was neglected, although these works explain in their own way the content of God's message, and of his revelation to man. But in the present document these 'deeds' are mentioned, in fact placed in the first rank, among the means by which God makes himself known. And the Constitution explains the intimate connection between the two means which God uses in revelation—deeds and words—and shows how these illustrate and complement each other.

(2) In order better to understand this doctrine let us begin

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[8] We have already used, and shall frequently have to use in the future, the words 'plan' or 'stewardship' or 'order' or 'training', all of which are translations of the Greek *oikonomia*. This means the orders or directions given by the master of a house, a bailiff or sometimes even by a public authority or official, etc. In the New Testament (cf. Eph. 1:10; 3:9; Col. 1:25; I Tim. 1:4), the word *oikonomia*, variously translated into English, signifies and comprehends all that God has ordained, decreed and accomplished for the salvation of men and also his dealings with them.

with an example which will illustrate it clearly. We find abundant material in the account of God's fundamental revelation on Mount Sinai. Here are first of all the 'deeds' by means of which God reveals himself—this is immediately before the proclamation of the Ten Commandments: 'On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And, as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder' (Ex. 19:16-19). Further on is recorded the terrible impression which this apparition made on the people: 'Now, when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood far off, and said to Moses: 'You speak to us and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die"' (*ibid.*, 20:18-19).

Now there come the 'words' with which first Moses, in God's name, and then God himself declared the divine works and the mystery contained in them. Moses answers his people's cry of terror by explaining the meaning of the lesson which God intended to give them through this manifestation: 'Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin' (*ibid.*, 20:20). Thus a tremendous manifestation of God emphasized the proclamation of the Ten Commandments, and the thunders and lightnings 'manifested and proclaimed the doctrine and the truth of the words', that is of the Decalogue. Later on God himself interpreted the deeds, commanding Moses to say to the children of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen . . .' (*ibid.*, 20:22-23).

Obviously, in the majority of cases, God does not 'show himself' simply to inspire fear. A short time before the terrifying revelation on Mount Sinai, God had interpreted other 'deeds', the benefits bestowed on his people when they left Egypt, as a sign of his especial predilection for them. He had told Moses to say in his name to the people: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on my eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex. 19:3-6).[9]

(3) It is obvious that, considered in this way, the revelation of God in Scripture seems to us much more rich and positive, all the more so because the principle here put forward by the Council has also much wider possibilities of application. Our interest should go beyond those interpretations of divine actions

which are offered on the occasion of the actions themselves.[10] Frequently the interpretations are given to us by God, centuries afterwards, through inspired writers. Think, for example, of the meditations on the history of the chosen people which we find in Psalms 76 (77) and 105 (106), and of the considerations put forward in the Book of Wisdom concerning the lives of the patriarchs at the time of the escape of the people from the plagues of Egypt (Wisdom 10:16-19), and of God's dealings with the Canaanites (*ibid.*, 12), or of the descriptions of the great leaders and patriarchs of the people which we find in Ecclesiasticus 44-50.

(4) It is particularly useful to study the applications of the principle to the 'deeds and words' of the New Testament, and especially to the miracles of Christ. This is explained by St Augustine, in his usual clear and practical way, with a simile. In the case of a manuscript, (it was long before the invention of printing!) he says: 'There are some who are full of admiration before the beauty and skill of the lettering but, unable to read, are ignorant of the contents. On the other hand there are others who, besides admiring the beauty of the lettering, understand the contents too because they can read. The same thing happens with regard to our Lord's miracles. Some are full of astonishment at these happenings, but do not know how to interpret their meaning. But we must be the intelligent scholars of the Lord's school, knowing how to get behind the facts to their profound meaning.[11]

And the meaning must be profoundly understood. As regards the history of the interpretation of Christ's miracles we often find interpreters who succeed in discerning some sort of meaning in them, especially when they are considered as divine portents which testify to the divine mission of Christ, but they stop short there. But the Constitution tells us that these works not only 'proclaim', but reveal the doctrine and the truths contained in the words. Many examples could be quoted. Before healing the man born blind, in the account given us by St John, Christ explains that the poor man had been born like that so that 'the works of God might be made manifest in him'. When he had worked the miracle Christ explains that this amazing portent showed that he, Christ, was the master of spiritual vision also, that is, of faith. In fact, after the blind man who had recovered his sight had professed his faith and worshipped him, Jesus added, alluding to the incredulity of the Jewish leaders: 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind' (John 9:39).

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[9] See also the more profound explanation of this same event which is given in Deuteronomy. Moses is speaking to the Israelites: 'And when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; and you said: "Behold, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire; we have this day seen God with man and still live. Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire, as we have, and has still lived?" ' (Deut. 3:23-26). This was a profound religious experience which is later summed up in the Constitution: 'He so manifested himself through words and deeds as the one true and living God that Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men . . . ' (no. 14). That is why the manifestation of God on Sinai is, in Scripture, understood to have been a gift of God to Israel, a gift unique of its kind, as Moses explains: 'For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of the heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live?' (Deut. 4:32-33).

[10] Important in this connection are the brief reflections inserted in the middle of the account of the experiences of the chosen people, for example in the Books of Joshua, Judges, the Chronicles, etc., reflections which prove the religious character of the whole history of the people of Israel, without impairing, indeed even strengthening, historical authenticity.

[11] Cf. *Sermo* 98, P.L. 38, 952; cf. also Tract, *24 in Joh.*, P.L. 35, 1592 et seq.

After the miracle of the loaves Christ asked his hearers to beg him for the spiritual food of faith: 'Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal' (John 6:26-27). Notice that Christ thinks of the miracle as the divine seal on his mission, but also as a proof that he is able to give the bread of eternal life, as he explains later in a long sermon. Later on he himself explains this more clearly, promising the 'bread of life', the sacrament of the Eucharist (*ibid.*, 51-63).

Even more clearly, if that were possible, does Christ interpret the profound significance of that miracle which was to give the final incentive to those who plotted against him—the raising of Lazarus. Before he raised the dead man to life he asked Martha to make an open avowel of faith in him as the master of life, as life itself and resurrection: 'I am the resurrection and the life: he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11:25-26). And the miracle not only confirmed the truth of his assertion but revealed its meaning, 'emphasizing the truths revealed by the words'.

As we conclude our consideration of the means used by God to reveal himself to mankind we begin to understand the profundity and importance of the doctrine which the Council explains to us so briefly. Obviously, not in every case is the meaning, the most profound meaning, of God's works immediately clear to us. But this does not mean that the doctrine put forward by the Council is therefore to be questioned. Instead of arousing doubts in us, these difficulties should inspire an even greater interest and encourage interpreters to undertake further research (cf. E.B. 563). This labour will often be rewarded with astounding discoveries, and in every case with a more profound knowledge of the way in which God reveals himself, and of the infinite mystery hidden in all his works.

The story of salvation

From the doctrine that, in order to reveal himself, God makes use of 'deeds and words', is derived a new and important theological concept—that of the 'history of salvation'. In fact the Constitution speaks of the 'deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation'. This history is very largely the history of mankind. The Constitution proceeds to explain that the story of God's manifestations begins with the forefathers of the human race and continues, in various ways and degrees, in the following ages, reaching its culmination in Christ. This final stage is explained in the Council's *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*: 'This universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is not carried out exclusively in the soul of an individual man, in secrecy. Nor is it achieved merely through those various endeavours, some of them religious, by which men search for God. In order to establish peace, that it, communion between sinful human beings and himself, and to fashion them into a brotherly community, God determined to intervene in human history in a new and definite way. For he sent us his own Son, clothed in our flesh . . .' (*Missions*, no. 3).

(1) The significance of the concept of the history of salvation is evident also in the great importance assigned to it in the Council documents, over all of which it exercises a noteworthy

and important influence. The *Constitution on the Church* says: 'The books of the Old Testament recount that period in the history of salvation during which the coming of Christ into the world was gradually being prepared' (*Church,* no. 55). And in the same Constitution we read that God 'therefore chose the race of Israel to be his own people, and established a covenant with it. Step by step he taught this people by manifesting in its history both himself and his divine purposes, and by making it holy for himself' (*Church,* no. 9; cf. also no. 65). This use of the term 'history' does not recur, but salvation is described as it develops and is fulfilled through history (cf. *Liturgy,* no. 5; *Revelation,* no. 14; *Church,* no. 52). This concept is held to be of such importance that the Council has arranged the whole new programme of theological teaching in the light of the history of salvation. The *Decree on Priestly Formation,* besides asking students to study the 'pre-eminent themes of divine revelation' and insisting that 'dogmatic theology should be so arranged that the Biblical themes are presented first', lays down the general principle that all other theological studies 'should also be renewed by a more vital contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation' (*Priestly Formation,* no. 16). In its turn the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity,* after a general recommendation that the Council's decisions with regard to the education and training of the priests should be diligently carried out, and a confirmation of what had already been stated concerning theological studies, asserts explicitly: 'the whole training of students should be planned in the light of the mystery of salvation as it is revealed in the Scriptures' (*Missions,* no. 16)—that is, in the light of its development through history, as presented to us in Holy Scripture.

(2) We must nevertheless admit that this important concept suggests some intellectual difficulties to the modern man. He is afraid that, if he admits this idea, he may seem simple-minded and credulous, like the people of bygone times who saw all around them the direct or indirect interventions of God, so that their world seemed to them to be swarming with spirits sent by the gods and working to their orders. But that was a very different thing. Whoever, for example, considers even the Old Testament alone and compares it with the literature of the Ancient East, must recognise that here is found a greater sobriety. Let us set aside those passages which describe popular beliefs and customs, which are always criticized, if not actually condemned, by God's messengers.[12] When it is a question of deeds and words which Scripture considers and presents as authentic manifestations of God, they are accompanied by solid and sufficient proofs—evidently corresponding to the mentality and culture of the people concerned—which substantiate the assertion that it was God himself who appeared or spoke.[13] Wherever we have these 'proofs', we can only accept the facts in faith. The frequency of these events in the Old Testament may seem to us excessive—but here we must be careful to remember that in the books of the Old Testament are condensed centuries of divine manifestations. If these manifestations are spread out over the course of centuries, it is at once clear that they are by no means so frequent as would appear from a hasty reading of the Old Testament. Besides this, we must also point out that if the events are validly attested, and are of God, it is not for men to doubt them simply because of their frequency. More or less the same observations may be made in the case of the accounts given in the gospels, for these also condense manifestations of God in Christ which took place during many months of his ministry, in various places and before different people. If in Christ there appeared 'the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour' (Titus 3:4), is it surprising that the divine benefits, which are the sign of his presence, become much more frequent and more wonderful?

(a) But let us consider more in detail the two principal sources of the difficulties felt by modern man when he is faced with the notion of God's intervention in the history of mankind. The first source comes from certain philosophical and theological concepts. We are told that God is too great to allow himself to meddle in paltry human affairs, that is, in human history. God and the world are realities so different from each other that they cannot mingle.

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[12] Cf. for example Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Num. 23:23; Deut. 18:10-11; II Kings 21:6; III Kings 28:3; Is. 8:19; 47:9, 12-13; Jer. 27:9; Wisdom 18-13.

[13] Cf. for example the instructions given in Deuteronomy concerning the gift of prophecy and the criteria distinguishing true prophets from false, cf. Deut. 18:14-22.

Obviously we cannot deal with this problem at length. Let us simply point to the assertions about God's dealings with the world which we find throughout Scripture. A fundamental fact concerning this can be deduced from what we have already said about the possibility of acquiring knowledge of God by the light of human reason, and about the means of arriving at this knowledge.

Although the Sacred Books of both Old and New Testaments assert the absolute transcendance of God, that is, his divine superiority to any created thing, nevertheless they also affirm that, by a consideration of these created things, man may know God, his greatness, beauty, eternal power and divinity. Now this affirmation implies that, although God is so different from the created world, yet there must be some affinity, however remote, between him and creation. The second fact is that God, although divinely superior to the whole world, is nevertheless the Creator and master who still preserves it and co-operates in its life, that is, although in a manner unknown to us, he really and regularly enters into our history. Why then should he not reveal himself to men also in an extraordinary manner, with 'deeds and words'?

(b) Another reason for modern man's difficulties about God's intervention in history arises from the contemporary concept of nature. When modern man thinks of nature he thinks only of its laws and their 'iron-bound regularity'. But in so doing he forgets that nature too with all her laws is the work of God, 'the Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible' (Creed). Therefore we must admit that God, as master of his own creation, and therefore of the laws which he imposed upon it, may intervene whenever and wherever he wishes. These divine interventions bring no disorder or unrest into nature, because they are interventions of God, who is supreme wisdom and supreme order, not only the Creator of the world but the power which maintains it in existence and co-operates in its activity.

Let us add also a truth we have received by faith. From the very first pages of Scripture man is presented as the centre and purpose of everything that is inferior to him (cf. Gen. 1:29; Psalm 8, 7-9; I Cor. 3:22; etc.). He has been created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:27); he is 'the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake' (*Modern World*, no. 24). Is it not then natural that God, for the sake of this chosen creature of his, should intervene in the history of creatures which were made to serve man? These interventions should surprise us even less when they serve the sublime purpose of revealing God to men, a revelation which is intended to give men access to God, make him a sharer in the divine nature and admit him to communion with God himself.

Christ, the 'Mediator and the fulness of all revelation'

We have now explained the meaning of the concept of the history of salvation, its availability and its importance. This importance will be even more clearly set forth in further comments on this chapter of the Constitution. The document concludes its general exposition of revelation with these magnificent words, rich in meaning: 'By this revelation, then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is made clear to us in Christ, who is the Mediator and at the same time the fulness of all revelation' (no. 2). This is not yet the right place for us to give a fuller explanation of Christ's function in revelation. We shall do this when we study the fourth paragraph of the Constitution, which is entirely devoted to this theme. Here we wish rather to explain the words we have quoted above in their own context, that is, in the light of the Council's explanation of various general aspects of revelation. In so doing we shall be able to sum up the conclusions of this present chapter, and these words will be seen in their true significance, as a concise recapitulation of all that the Council has expounded in the paragraph which they conclude.

Let us first of all remember that it is through Christ, the 'Word made flesh' that men are given access to the Father and enabled to share in the divine nature. Moreover, the supreme kindness which the 'invisible God' shows when he deigns to speak with men as friends and hold converse with them, reaches its culmination in the appearance of the loving kindness and humanity of God—our Saviour Christ (cf. Titus 3:4); when he became man he made himself not only the friend but in all things the equal of man, except that he was without sin (cf. Heb. 4:15). And it is in Christ, the only begotten Son of God, that men become sons of the Father and are admitted to fellowship with God, above all through charity, which has been poured into men's hearts by means of the Spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ. And it is in Christ's person, his life and teaching, that God's revelation to mankind reaches its fulness, because he is one with the Father; in him, in close communion with men, dwells all the fulness of the deity (cf. Col. 2:9). Therefore whoever sees him sees the Father also (cf. John 14:9).

Our study of the 'mystery of God's will', and the important conclusions we have reached, throw a clear light upon the work yet to be done in explaining the first chapter of the *Constitution on Divine Revelation.* We have seen God's great and sublime plan for the salvation of the human family. The plan is great because of the possibilities it offers mankind, and because of the Mediator who makes it known to men and brings it to fulfilment. He is the only begotten Son of God, and God has made him the Head of the new mankind. The divine plan arouses our wonder because of the human and practical way in which God intends to carry it out, drawing near to men as their friend, indeed, making himself, through the Incarnation, one of them, in order to invite and admit them into communion with himself. It is easy to perceive that the divine purpose, which raises man to a higher plane, and the means chosen by God to carry out this purpose, that is, the Incarnation, are so incredibly sublime

in themselves that a long preparation is needed to enable man to co-operate as he should. Without this preparation there is a danger that, even if they do not scornfully reject the divine plan, men may not understand it in all its significance and may fall far short of giving God the willing co-operation which he requires. Therefore God has in fact worked out his purpose by gradual stages in the course of the long history of salvation. This history will be described in a later chapter, from the long preparatory period when 'God spake of old to our fathers by the prophets' (Heb. 1:1). until his full revelation in his Son. As man's own well-being and dignity require that he should not submit passively to this process but accept these infinite gifts of God intelligently and freely, it is necessary for the Council to show us also in what way man can actually enter into this divine scheme—and this is the last point dealt with by the Council in the first chapter of this Constitution. These are then the two themes of the next two chapters: the long preparation for salvation and its fulfilment in Christ, in a word the 'history of salvation', and man's responses to God's revelation of himself.

3 | The history of salvation before the coming of Christ

We have already explained, that God, revealing himself with 'deeds and words', enters into our history. This suggests many new and important questions: where and how did this revelation first appear in the history of mankind? What actual forms did it assume? We have said previously that the sublime grandeur of God's plan required a correspondingly great and careful preparation of mankind and now we ask: how long did this preparation last? What stages did it pass through, and in what way were men prepared for the appearance of Christ, the Mediator and the fulness of revelation? We see already that the history of salvation, as summed up in the first chapter of the Constitution, can be divided into two great stages: the preparation for Christ's coming (no. 3), and the revelation of God in Christ, the Son of God made man. These are the themes of the next two chapters of our commentary.

The preparation may be divided into two long periods: God's revelation to the fore-fathers of the human family before their fall into sin and, after the fall, to them and to their descendants; the second period covers God's revelation to Abraham and to his progeny, the chosen people of Israel who were, after the patriarchs, taught by God through Moses and the prophets. As we explain this preparation we shall always bear in mind the purpose of the entire chapter: to seek to understand the profound and living reality of the revelation of God, and then to perceive God himself who thus makes himself known to men, and to study his dealings with men when he was preparing them for the full divine revelation in Christ.[1]

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[1] The theme of this chapter is treated more amply by Cardinal Bea in *The Church and the Jewish People,* Chapman, London, 1965, chap. II, 'Towards the unity of the human family'; chap. III 'The election of Israel and the origins of the Church'.

God reveals himself to our forefathers

The account of mankind's long preparation for the coming of the Saviour begins, in the Constitution, with a phrase expressing God's earnest desire that men should know him: 'God, who through the word creates all things (cf. John 1:3) and maintains them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to himself in created realities (cf. Rom. 1:19-20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, from the beginning he showed himself to our first parents' (no. 3). Then, after having thus stated the two ways in which God reveals himself to men, the Constitution speaks of his significant self-revelation after the fall of our first parents: 'After their fall his promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (cf. Gen. 3:15)' (*ibid.*). This is the first important stage of divine revelation: the Council states first of all that God revealed himself from the beginning of the world, and that this revelation was sufficient to open the way to eternal life, that is, to that participation in the divine life and communion with God of which we have spoken. After our forefathers had fallen into sin his revelation took the form of fatherly support and encouragement, in order to give them a hope of salvation, or rather the hope that even after sin and in spite of sin it would be in some way possible to attain the salvation God had offered them before they sinned. These assertions in the Constitution are full of significance and enable us to understand not only a great deal about the origins of the human family but above all, something of the fatherly mercy shown by God to men.

What are the theological and Scriptural foundations for this doctrine set forth by the Council? The answer is to be found in the first chapters of Genesis, considered in the light of all later revelation. These chapters may at first sight seem very clear, simple and obvious, but they make a very different impression when they are interpreted more accurately and profoundly. Now the question at once arises as to how far these are to be accepted as anthropomorphic accounts, corresponding to a specific mentality proper to the 'state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ' (*Revelation,* no. 15), and, granted this anthropomorphic character, what is the authentic intention of the inspired author, the intention of God, concerning such decisive events in the early history of mankind? It is not easy to answer this question. There are certainly some fixed points which must firmly be accepted, but others are obscure, and the present state of research does not permit us to give a definite answer. We can only suggest the solution.

(1) Before entering into the pros and cons of this question we must speak of the method to be used in the interpretation of these texts. The well known letter of the Pontifical Biblical Commission addressed to Cardinal Suhard is very instructive on this subject. It admits that the question of the literary form of the first eleven chapters of Genesis is 'obscure and complex'. Then, after having enumerated the many factors which must be taken into account in the interpretation of these texts, problems of a literary, scientific, historical, cultural and religious nature which are inter-connected, the letter continues with a warning: 'Any *a priori* declaration that these accounts (in the first eleven chapters) are not historical in the modern sense of the word might easily lead one to suppose that they are not historical in any sense, whereas in fact they describe in simple and figurative language, adapted to the intelligence of comparatively primitive men, the fundamental truths presupposed in the plan of salvation, while at the same time they describe in simple language the origins of mankind and of the chosen race' (E.B. 581). The letter adds that while we await the solution of these complex problems we must practice 'patience, which is prudence and wisdom' (*ibid.*). This brief quotation shows us already how carefully we must proceed in this field in order not to err through ingenuous or superficial thinking.

Let us add two more considerations, or rather principles, to guide us. The first, already mentioned, that the divine words which 'proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them' (*Revelation,* no. 2) are not to be sought merely in the immediate context of the account of these deeds and works, in which God reveals himself, but in revelation taken as a whole, especially in its slow and sure progress towards its fulness in Christ. Here we find a valid principle for the true interpretation of the word of God, a principle which is expressed in the *Constitution on Revelation*: 'Serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly interpreted. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account, along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith' (no. 12).[2] In fact, once we have accepted in faith the fact of God's progressive revelation of himself through history, it is obvious that the whole process of this manifestation forms an indivisible whole, conceived and gradually effected through the infinite wisdom of God. Therefore it must be considered and interpreted as an integral process of revelation, in which all elements serve to interpret one another.

(2) Let us make a brief synthesis of all that the early chapters of Genesis may tell us, interpreted in the light of the above mentioned guiding principles.

(a) The situation and life of our forefathers are described to us in the first chapters of Genesis. They lived in a certain intimacy with God. God himself, speaking to them as a friend, told them what they must do, not only concerning, for example, the use of the tree of life (Gen. 2:16-17) but also concerning their sustenance (1:29-30; 2:16), their power to generate (cf. 1:28), and their relations with the vegetable and animal world (1:29-30). That they were on frank and familiar terms with God is shown by the references to their 'nakedness'. Before they sinned, their nakedness did not prevent this familiarity with God: 'And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed' (2:25). Instead, after the Fall, not only did they try to cover their bodies but they hid themselves from God, making the excuse that they were 'naked': 'I was afraid, because I was naked: and I hid myself' (3:10) said Adam. Nevertheless, they remained in the friendship of God, although on different terms, even after they had disobeyed the divine command (cf. 3:9-19). We must note also the significant reference to 'death', that is, the punishment which they were to undergo for having eaten of the 'tree of life', against God's express command: 'in the day that you eat of it you shall die' (2:17). Certainly the death here referred to is not only spiritual death but bodily death also, as is made clear in the punishment inflicted upon them: '... till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return' (3:19). This means that if they had not sinned they would not have had to suffer bodily death. This is confirmed also in the Book of Wisdom: 'for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it' (Wisdom 2:23-24). St Paul also says that death, and he certainly means bodily death also, is the penalty of sin: 'The wages of sin is death' (Rom. 6:23).

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[2] Cf. no. 12. We shall speak of this principle at greater length later on, showing, apart from the question treated here, its profound reasons; cf. also *Church*, no. 55: the application of this method to Mariology.

(b) Now we must ask what is the real significance of these stories and their details? Certainly they are told in 'simple and figurative language', adapted to men of a less highly developed civilization, but nevertheless we must not consider these writings as being purely figurative and metaphorical, thus reducing their sense to an anthropomorphic presentation of merely natural situations and events. First of all, there is the fundamental fact of immortality, referred to in connection with its loss after sin, a fact clearly confirmed by later revelation. This element alone suffices to prove that our forefathers were already being directed towards the goal of supernatural salvation, that is, they were 'made by God, in the likeness of his own nature', as Wisdom says. This fact is further confirmed by the fundamental doctrine taught in the New Testament, by which Christ's work of redemption is not conceived and presented as the creation of a completely new state for mankind, but as the 'reparation', or rather the restitution—although of course in a more perfect and

sublime manner because it is brought about by the incarnate word—of what had been lost in Adam, the first father of the human race. This is the significance of the explicit distinction made between the two heads of the human family, Adam and Christ: 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned ... Adam was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.... Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous' (Rom. 5:12, 14-15, 18-19; cf. I Cor. 15:47-49). St John also asserts: 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil' (I John 3:8), that is, to repair the damage wrought by the devil when he persuaded Adam to disobey God's command. Now, if our first parents were already being guided to their supernatural salvation, it is logical to conclude that the accounts in Genesis which speak of the relationship between God and our forefathers cannot be merely metaphorical expressions of natural knowledge and natural events, but must be manifestations of God made in order to 'prepare the way for their supernatural salvation'. That is, they were intended to enable them to understand the supernatural elements out of which their life was made and, first of all, their immortality and the conditions for preserving it.

(c) This conclusion is further confirmed in Genesis, in the accounts of what took place after man's first disobedience. Here also, notwithstanding the figurative character of the language, we have, in the account of God's revelation, some fixed points which every interpretation must preserve—bodily death, as the consequence of sin, and above all the 'promise of redemption', bringing with it a new hope of salvation. In fact, God said to the serpent: 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel' (3:15). The Book of Wisdom, interpreting these events in the light of Adam's life after his fall into sin, adds: 'Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, and gave him strength to rule all things' (Wisdom 10:1).

God cared for the whole human race

What we have already said suffices to point out, within the framework of our study, the biblical foundations for the Council's affirmation that from the beginning God revealed himself to our first parents and, with the promise of redemption, raised them up again in the hope of salvation. The Council, referring to the whole period up to the calling of Abraham, adds the general assertion that even after man's fall God did not forsake men but always gave them the help they needed for salvation, and will give eternal life to 'those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality' (cf. Rom. 2:6-7). Likewise the *Constitution on the Church* says that, after men had fallen into sin, God did not abandon them but ceaselessly offered them help towards salvation, in anticipation of Christ the Redeemer (cf. *Church,* no. 2). From the context of the words quoted in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation,* there is no doubt that the Council intends to refer primarily to the accounts given in chapters 4-11 of Genesis, considering them in the light of the whole of revelation and particularly in as much as they concern the Christian doctrine of the universality of salvation; this is clear from the text of the letter to the Romans, to which the Constitution refers.

(1) The accounts given in these chapters of Genesis do not offer us a complete history—obviously this would not have been possible—of all that God did for mankind from the creation until the calling of Abraham. They offer us certain illustrations: for example, the enigmatic 'family tree' in chapter 5, which expresses in simple figurative language the idea that all men constitute one family; then there is the story of the increasing wickedness of men and the resultant confusion; after this we have the culminating account of the flood and of the rescue of Noah, as a new proof of God's care for him and, through him, for all mankind. It need not surprise us that these chapters present only single episodes, for their aim is not to offer anything like a complete story of the origins of man, but to prepare the reader to understand the story of the calling of Abraham and the gradual preparation of the chosen people of Israel. These episodes nevertheless express the general idea that God, who had in the beginning cared for his beloved creature, man, continued to do so in spite of the sin of our first parents; in fact that sin, in a certain sense, caused God to take even greater care of man in order to keep his promise of redemption.

(2) This notion of God's care for men is further confirmed in many other texts of Holy Scripture. In fact it is generally asserted that God, as Creator of all men and all peoples, has a fatherly care for all. This thought is expressed in various ways. First of all let us refer to St Paul's letter to the Romans, quoted in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation,* in which St Paul, like the psalmist, states that God is the just and impartial judge of all men, without distinction of race or people, and according to men's works punishes the wicked and rewards the good; God 'will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality' (Rom. 2, 6-11; cf. Psalm 61 [62]:12). Similarly St Peter, although he speaks only of the more positive aspects, that is of God's love for the good, says concerning Cornelius: 'Truly I

perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him (Acts, 10:34-35)' (cf. *Church*, no. 9).

The thought that God watches over individual men, and mankind as a whole, like a father, is seen also, though less clearly, in the Old Testament. God loves all created things and hates nothing that he has made (cf. Wisdom 11:24). He is 'good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made' Psalm 145 [144]:9; cf. Eccli. 18:13). His wisdom 'reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and orders all things well' (Wisdom 8:1). 'It is thy providence, O Father, that steers its course [the sailor's ship] because thou hast given it a path in the sea, and a safe way through the waves' (Wisdom 14:3; cf. Prov. 16:1, 9). So God 'did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness', as Paul and Barnabas declared to the pagans at Lystra (Acts 14:17).

He will surely therefore guide man to the attainment of the essential and final blessed goal which he himself has destined for them! In fact, this guidance he gives to men to lead them to their salvation is already shown in various ways in the Old Testament. For example, we perceive the gradual development of the notion that all peoples are included in the vocation of Israel, and this is apparent in the appeals addressed to these peoples to worship and invoke God together with Israel (cf. Psalm 21 [22]:27-28; 46 [47]:2; 64 [65]:8; 95 [96]:1-3, 7; 97 [98]:4; 116 [117]:1; cf. Rom. 15:10-11).

Isaiah also, in his famous vision, sees all the nations of the earth coming to the Lord's temple in Sion (Is. 2:1-4; cf. Micah 4:1-3). He likewise predicts that in the messianic age, when the Lord will appear above Jerusalem, all the peoples will walk in his light (cf. Is. 60:1-9). And the psalmist foretells that as a consequence of the passion and glorification of the suffering Messiah 'All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him' (Psalm 21 [22]:29).[3] Jeremiah announces prophetically: 'At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart' (Jer. 3:17). Ezekiel is equally clear about this: 'Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore' (Ezekiel 37:28; cf.also Amos 9:11-12). Therefore in the time of the Messiah, when the Spirit of God is poured out over men, 'all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered' (Joel 2:32). These references, which occur with such frequency, are like the dawn which heralds the rising of the sun of revelation in the New Testament. In fact St Paul makes a general assertion that as God is the God of all, so salvation too belongs to all: 'Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith, and the uncircumcised through their faith' (Rom. 3:29-30). Elsewhere the apostle confirms this declaration by referring to the books of the Old Testament: 'The scripture says: "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, "every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" ' (Rom. 10:11-12). And it is not merely that the way to salvation is open to all. St Paul affirms that God earnestly desires the salvation of all: 'God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (I Tim. 2:4). St John echoes this doctrine in his gospel: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16).

The preparation of salvation through Israel

God's general purpose for the salvation of mankind assumes a more precise and determined direction with the calling of

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[3] Psalm 21(22):28; see also the Psalms which express the universality of the Kingdom of God in the time of the Messiah: Psalms 71 (72):10; 95 (96): 1-3.

Abraham and the story of his descendants, the chosen people of the Old Testament. 'Then, at the time he had appointed, he called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation' (Gen. 12:2). Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, he taught the nation to acknowledge him as the one living and true God, provident Father and just Judge, and to wait for the Saviour he had promised them. In this manner he prepared the way for the gospel down through the centuries' (*Revelation,* no. 3; cf. also *Church,* nos. 2, 9; *Non-Christians,* no. 4; *Liturgy,* no. 5). No attempt is made here to trace, however briefly, the history of the chosen people from their origins till Christ's coming—which would be impossible in so short a space—nor even to discuss the various problems that arise from this preparation of salvation in the Old Testament. These will be dealt with, at least in part, in the Constitution (nos. 14-16). First the Council intended merely to point out the special character of the history of Israel, through which the salvation of man was prepared, and also to indicate the three great stages of this preparation, characterized by their dominant figures, men who received direct revelation from God for the good of their people: Abraham and the patriarchs, Moses, and finally the prophets. After this short exposition, the nature and immediate significance of God's manifestations to the people, and the lessons he taught, are briefly summed up. Our commentary on this passage will be restricted to defining once more, to avoid any misunderstanding, the concept of the special calling and election of Abraham and of his descendants—and then we shall indicate the principal passages of the New Testament which confirm this special character of the history of the people of Israel.

(1) First of all let us take note of this idea of divine election. The doctrine of the chosen race may, especially to modern men, who are so sensitive about equality among men and peoples, seems like a kind of racialism, or in any case of nationalism, which asserts the superiority of its own nation and does not hesitate for this purpose to make an abusive use even of what is most sacred to man: his religion. In Christian doctrine,

and therefore in the doctrine put forward by the Council, there is no trace of this. To be convinced of this, it suffices to reflect upon the following consideration. The choice of Abraham, and so of the people of Israel, is a free gift of God, not the result of man's skill or merit. Even in the Old Testament God is shown to be very careful to emphasize this gift and initiative, and he points this out repeatedly to the Israelites: 'Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, "It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land" . . . know therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people' (Deut. 9:4, 6). Nor had God chosen the Israelites because they were a great people, for they were the 'fewest of all peoples' (cf. Deut. 7:7). The reason why they were chosen was simply this: 'because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage . . .' (Deut. 7:7-8). Indeed, the Lord was faithful to this free election in spite of the innumerable infidelities and sins of the people. This supreme independence of God's free choice is later most strikingly expressed in the well known words of the Forerunner, addressed to people of the same race: 'Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves: "We have Abraham as our father"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham' (Matt. 3:8-9).

We must add that, although this choice was also the expression of God's special love for the people of Israel, to whom he entrusted so fine and noble a mission, nevertheless, as his final purpose was to bring about the salvation of all mankind, so the choice was indirectly an expression of his love for all men. In fact, the special calling of Abraham was to be for the good of all peoples: 'By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves' (Gen. 12:13), the Lord said to Abraham. This connection between the election of Abraham and the good of all men can be illustrated from what the Council *Declaration on* *the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* says concerning it—'The Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to the mystery of God's plan for salvation, the beginnings of her faith and her election are already to be found among the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets.' But at the same time she explains that the Church has received all these benefits, not *from* the Jewish people, but *through* them. 'The Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his infinite mercy deigned to establish the ancient covenant' (*Non-Christians,* no. 4). In other words, our gratitude for the gift of salvation is due to the only Giver of all good things. This is especially true in as much as God is the supreme and exclusive initiator, not only of our election, but of all its consequences.

Moreover, the election of Israel by no means implies that God is interested in Israel alone and not in other peoples. The assertion in the Constitution that God 'ceaselessly watched over the human race' refers not only to the period before the election of Israel, but to all our history. The election of Israel is the beginning of a very special and more intense preparation for the Saviour's coming; but it does not mean the end of God's general care for all mankind. In fact this care grew in intensity with the approach of the 'fulness of time'. This is seen even in the Old Testament passages which we have quoted to prove God's universal love for all peoples. In fact, in these passages God shows his chosen people that, while loving them in this special way, he does not cease to watch over all other peoples. This watchful care is shown in a touching way in the story of the mission of the prophet Jonah to Nineveh, and his preaching there. This prophet was so foolish as to feel aggrieved because God had shown mercy to the people of Nineveh whom the prophet's sermons had converted: 'But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry' says the Scripture. In fact the prophet came near to rebuking the Lord: 'I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil.' And the embittered prophet begs the Lord to let him die: 'For it is better for me to die than to live.' God then taught him a lesson, using the analogy of the tree, which had given Jonah shade, and finally said to him: 'Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who did not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?' (Jonah 4:1-2; cf. also Jer. 18:7-8).

As modern man sets such great store by this universality of God's care for all peoples, it is best to illustrate it with some significant declarations made by the Second Vatican Council. The *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity,* when speaking of the way Christians should behave in the midst of non-Christians, tells us that we must be glad to discover and respect those seeds of the word that lie hidden in these non-Christian communities (cf. *Missions,* no. 11). A little earlier the same document had spoken of the Church's attitude to this matter: 'Whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, like a sort of secret presence of God, this (missionary) activity frees from all taint of evil and restores to Christ its maker' (*ibid.,* no. 9). In the *Constitution on the Church* the Council affirms as a general rule: 'Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the gospel. She regards such qualities as given by him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life' (no. 16; cf. also nos. 13, 17). The same doctrine is found in the *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions*: the Church 'looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men' (*Non-Christians,* no. 2; cf. also *Priestly Formation,* no. 16). This positive attitude towards men who do not know Christ, and the recognition of the truths they already possess go so far as to enable the Church to teach that in certain conditions these people may attain salvation: 'Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ, or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience' (*Church,* no. 16). And the document adds: 'Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to his grace' (*ibid.*). These words are in perfect agreement with what the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* said in the passage already referred to, namely, that God 'ceaselessly watched over the human race, in order to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation' (no. 3).

(2) It is evidently impossible to explain here in more detail the individual stages of the long preparation for salvation described in the Old Testament. Even the Council could not give, in the Constitution we are studying, such a detailed exposition. We will therefore merely indicate some of the principle passages in the New Testament which show the deep and solid foundations for the Council's doctrine that the history of the chosen people in the Old Testament, from Abraham up to the coming of Christ, is truly the history of the preparation of all mankind for salvation. We quote from the New Testament also because this is the simplest way to understand what the Council here teaches, and above all because the Church's faith in the revelation of the Old Testament is based on the authority of Christ and of his messengers, the apostles. In fact they absorbed and expressed Old Testament teaching in their own evangelical preaching (cf. *Revelation,* no. 16); it is they who guarantee the authenticity of its revelation of God.

(a) First of all, let us illustrate the fact that the story of Israel is really the story of the preparation of all men for salvation. With this in mind Jesus challenged the scribes and the pharisees: 'You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me . . . if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me' (John 5:39, 46). Later on, speaking of his passion, Jesus presents it as already foretold in Scripture, that is, 'written': 'And taking the twelve, he said to them: "Behold we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon; they will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise" ' (Luke 18:31-32; cf. 9:22, 45). And after his resurrection he explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: ' "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24: 25-26). And he said later on to the other apostles: 'These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' And the evangelist adds: 'Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" ' (Luke 24: 44-47).

The apostles spoke in the same way as their Master. Even in the first days after Penecost St Peter declared frankly and firmly: 'The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant, Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate. . . . And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled' (Acts 3:13, 17-18). Later on the same apostle quoted the testimony of Moses and the prophets in confirmation of the mission and works of Jesus: 'Moses said: "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren, as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you . . . And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days' (*ibid.,* vv. 22, 24; cf. Acts 7:37). In the house of Cornelius St Peter declared: 'To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name' (Acts 10:43; cf. I Peter 1:10).

St Paul was also to quote the same sources as testimony. At Antioch of Pisidia he preached in the synagogue: 'Those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him. Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to have him killed. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. . . . We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second Psalm: "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee" ' (Acts 13:27-29, 32-33).

(b) We conclude this consideration of the long preparation for salvation found in the Old Testament by a brief summing up of what the Old Testament has to teach us. The Constitution tells us that God trained his chosen people by means of Moses and the prophets, teaching 'this nation to acknowledge him [God] as the one living and true God, provident Father and just Judge, and to wait for the Saviour he had promised them. In this manner he prepared the way for the gospel down through the centuries' (*Revelation*, no. 3). This is the best way to present the image of God revealed in the Old Testament. In fact he appears to us therein as a 'provident Father' who already spoke as a friend to our forefathers and had begun to prepare them for supernatural salvation. After they had disobeyed his commandment he showed himself as a severe Judge but did not cease to be their provident Father, for he encouraged our first parents and their descendants with the promise of future redemption from sin, and continued his fatherly care of the human family which he was gradually preparing for the coming of their Saviour. Although a just, even a severe, Judge, he showed ever greater kindness to men, becoming, through Moses and the prophets, the Teacher of the patriarchs, and of the people born of them.

What did God teach the people in order to prepare them for the full revelation in Christ, the Saviour of mankind? The answer to this question is very important because it shows us (cf. chap. 4 of *Revelation*, nos. 14-16) what every man, and all mankind, must do in order to receive this full revelation. God taught the people to acknowledge him as the 'only living and true God', that is, he taught profound faith in the living reality of God, as he is and as he reveals himself, actively intervening in man's life. And how does he intervene? As a 'provident Father and just Judge'. Not merely a Father, not merely a Judge, but both Father and Judge, according to the various phases of the life of men: a provident Father during our testing time in this life, a just Judge at the conclusion of our trial. But this is not all. God wished to enter man's life also as his Saviour from the sin into which he had fallen. Man had step by step to learn to understand the generous aid God offered him in his need, and he had to trust his promise and wait for the Saviour. This was the way in which through long centuries God prepared the way for the gospel, for that great moment when he would speak to men in the person of his Son, reconcile them to himself in the Son and bestow on them eternal life.

4 | Christ the Mediator: the fulness of revelation

'The deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is revealed to us in Christ, who is the Mediator and at the same time the fulness of all revelation' (no. 2). These words indicate already the greatness of the theme treated in this chapter, and the central place it occupies in the Constitution and in our commentary. Obviously so important and fundamental a theme suggests certain serious and difficult problems. The first of these is the mystery of Christ's Person, because he is at one and the same time the Mediator and the complete revelation; there is the problem of how he revealed himself and revealed God, and finally the question of the content of the revelation which he brought to men.

In illustrating this last and final stage of God's revelation of himself to men, the Constitution, quoting from the Bible, first stresses the profound reason for the unique pre-eminence of Christ in the gradual development of revelation. The reason is that Christ is the 'only begotten Son of God': 'After speaking in many places and in various ways through the prophets, God "last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2)' (no. 4). Starting from this basic truth the Constitution explains the revelation of God in Christ, first of all by illustrating the mystery of the Mediator, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and the way in which God revealed himself in him, then the essence of this revelation and finally its definitive character, as God's last word to men.

Let us consider first of all the mystery of the Man-God. This contains in itself, as in a kernel, the whole secret of the revelation of God which Christ brought to men. The Constitution says: 'He sent his Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that he might dwell among men and tell them the inner-

most realities about God (cf. John 1:1-8). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, sent as "a man to men", "speaks the words of God" (John 3:34) and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. John 5:36; 17:4)' (no. 4).

(1) Let us begin with the dogma of the Incarnation, namely, that the Word was sent by God 'as a man amongst men', to dwell among them, and explain to them the secrets of God. In words we have seen quoted by St Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, Moses announced to Israel the great gift of a supreme prophet: 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said: "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die." And the Lord said to me: "They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him"' (Deut. 18:15-18). Even those who interpreted these words in the collective sense of a whole series of prophets that God would send to Israel, cannot deny that they find a supreme fulfilment in Jesus Christ who, in prophecy as in other things, marks the culminating point of the religious history of Israel. In fact, he is seen throughout the whole history of the Israelites as a real man. Here was no brief and sporadic apparition of a Messiah descended from heaven, as certain Judaic traditions maintained (cf. for example John 7:27). Here was a man whose birthplace was known, as were his mother and 'brothers'. He led the simple life of the carpenter's son (Matt. 13:55); he 'took the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men' (Phil. 2:7), and 'had to be made like his brethren in ever respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God' (Heb. 2:17). The same letter to the Hebrews gives the reason for this. After having said that Christ does not disdain to call men his own

brothers, and quoted the words of the Messianic Psalm (21 [22]:22): 'I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee', it gives the reason: it was because as 'the children share in flesh and blood, he himself [Christ] likewise partook of the same nature' (Heb. 2:12, 14).

This kinship of the Incarnate Word with the human family is affirmed in great detail in the Council's *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*: 'The very Word made flesh chose to share in human fellowship. He was present at the wedding of Cana, visited the house of Zacchaeus, ate with publicans and sinners. He revealed the love of the Father and the sublime vocation of man in terms of the commonest social realities and by making use of the speech and imagery of ordinary everyday life. Willingly obeying his country's laws, he sanctified human ties, especially the family bonds which create social relationships. He chose to lead the life proper to an artisan of his time and place' (*Modern World,* no. 32).

The Council *Decree on Missionary Activity* shows us the profound connection between this solidarity and the redemption. 'The Son of God underwent a true Incarnation so that he might make man sharers in the divine nature. He became poor for our sakes, though he had been rich, in order that his poverty might enrich us (cf. II Cor. 8:9). The Son of Man came not to be served but to be a servant, and to give his life as a ransom for the many, that is, for all (cf. Mark 10:45)' (*Missions,* no. 3).

(2) And yet this man is also the eternal Word 'that enlightens every man', that is, he of whom St John speaks in the Prologue to his Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made'. And he was 'the true light that enlightens every man' (John 1:1-3, 9). Moreover, 'the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand' (John 3:35), and loves him in a unique manner; Christ asserts that he is in complete communion of life, possessions and works with the Father: 'My Father is working still, and I am working', he said to the pharisees (John 5:17), and he continued: 'Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these [the miracles] will he show him, that you may marvel' (*ibid.,* 5:19-21). A special element of this communion of life and works is the 'life' which Christ shares with the Father, and can communicate to men. Jesus spoke of this life when he promised the institution of the Eucharist: 'As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me' (John 6:57). And again: 'As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself' (*ibid.,* 5:26). This possession and communication of life is seen most clearly in the resurrection of the dead. That is why Jesus asserts: 'As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will' (*ibid.,* v. 21). So before he raises Lazarus from the tomb Jesus says: 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die' (John 11:24-25). And he proved his assertion with that astounding miracle.

Communion of 'life' implies communion in all that is most intimate, in perfect mutual knowledge. After having stated: 'All things have been delivered to me by my Father' Jesus continued: 'and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matt. 11:27; cf. Luke 10:22). So there is complete communion of all power and possession: 'All that the Father has is mine' (John 16:15); and in his high priestly prayer Jesus said to his Father: 'All mine are thine, and thine are mine' (John 17:10). This is especially clear in the passages in which Jesus speaks of the mission of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand Jesus says: 'I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever . . . the spirit of truth . . . (John 14:16-17), and he speaks of the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in his name (*ibid.*, v. 26); on the other hand he also says that he himself will send the Spirit: 'it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you'; 'when the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me' (John 16:7, 15:26).

Finally, besides this complete communion of life and power there is the unity of the divine nature itself, by virtue of which Christ is able to declare: 'I and the Father are one'; a little later, referring to his miracles, he said: 'If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe in me; but if I do them, even though you may not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father' (John 10:30, 37-38; cf. 17:21-23). Here we are faced with the mystery of the Holy Trinity itself, in which, as the *Decree on Missionary Activity* puts it, the Father is the 'origin without origin', from whom the Son is begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son' (no. 2). But all this occurs in a perfect unity which the Council's *Decree on Ecumenism* describes in the words: 'the unity of the Persons of the Trinity: the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, one God' (*Ecumenism,* no. 2).

The 'works' of Jesus

The mystery of the Mediator, the God-Man, is manifest in God's revelation of himself in him and through him. The Constitution describes this revelation in a most thoughtful paragraph: 'To see Jesus is to see his Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover, he confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed: that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal' (no. 4). As we see, this passage first lists the various means which Christ used to accomplish and perfect the divine revelation, and confirm it with his divine authority; then it indicates the essential content of this revelation, namely, that God is with us to free us from sin and to give us eternal life.

Following this order, let us begin with the means used by Christ to reveal God. These are: the very fact of his presence and manifestation of himself, and then, more specifically, his words and works, signs and miracles, and above all his death, his resurrection and his gift to us of the Holy Spirit. We shall deal more fully later on with the significance and effectiveness for the fulfilment of revelation of the presence and revelation of Christ himself, his death and resurrection and his sending of the Holy Spirit. Let us for the present merely consider his 'words and works' in their general aspect. They correspond to the 'deeds and words' which were indicated in the Constitution (no. 2) as the general means by which God reveals himself to men.

(1) The Council first speaks of his words, probably because it had just said that Christ, as the eternal Word, 'speaks the words of God' (John 3:34), and had been sent by the Father so that he might explain to them the secret purposes of God. We dealt with this consideration in our second chapter, when we spoke of the essential invisibility of God. We showed that Christ is, according to the teaching of the New Testament, 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15). He 'who is in the bosom of the Father he has made known' the God whom no man sees, nor can see (cf. John 1:18; I John 4:12). And that is why his hearers were so profoundly impressed by his words, his teaching and preaching: 'The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes' (Matt. 7:28-29). Even those who did not believe what he preached had to admit to their leaders: 'No man ever spoke like this man' (John 7:46).

(2) Now let us consider his 'works'. To judge from the accounts in the gospels it was his works which most profoundly impressed the men who witnessed the life and activity of Jesus. To recover this sense of wonder it is enough to study the brief summaries of his activity which we find in the gospels. In fact, among the stories of the individual cures which are generally recorded at some length, we find general remarks such as: 'That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons' (Mark 1:32-34). Or: 'Now the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on everyone of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying: "You are the Son of God." But he rebuked them, and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ' (Luke 4:40-41, cf. Matt. 4:23; 8:16). And: 'The crowds . . . followed him; and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the Kingdom of God, and cured those who had need of healing' (Luke 9:11). Even in the last days of his life 'the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them' (Matt. 21:14).

The gospels have a way of their own of describing this wonderful outburst of miraculous cures and exorcisms which seemed to spring from him as sparks from a fire. St Luke begins his account of the sermon on the mount by saying that there were 'a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon', who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And what happened was that 'those who were troubled with unclean diseases were cured; and all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came forth from him and healed them all' (Luke 6:17-19). And lest he should be misunderstood the same evangelist had, a short time before, used a profound expression which rendered his exact meaning: 'On one of those days, as he was teaching, there were pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem, and the *power of the Lord was with him to heal*' (Luke 5:17). It was not therefore a case of some mechanical force, electrical or magnetic; it was the power of God himself guiding him and working in him. This power is described very vividly in the account of the healing of the woman suffering from a flow of blood: 'And a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years and had spent all her living upon physicians, and could not be healed by any one, came up behind him, and touched the fringe of his garment; and immediately her flow of blood ceased. And Jesus said: "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said: "Master, the multitudes surround you and press upon you!" But Jesus said: "Some one touched me; for I perceive that power has gone forth from me." And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace"' (Luke 8:43-48).

These words and the manner in which the story is told show the irresistible impression which Christ's deeds had made on all men, so much so that St John the evangelist, summing up the life and works of Christ, felt able to declare: 'Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book' (John 20:30); and he added: 'But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (John 21:25). This is of course an exaggeration[1] but it shows the incredibly great number and frequency of these miracles accomplished by Christ. The number, and above all the great variety, of these deeds, produced the amazement which the gospels describe: 'They were all amazed and glorified God, saying: "We never saw anything like this!"' (Mark 2:12). 'And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying: "We have seen strange things today!"' (Luke 5:26). 'When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men' (Matt. 9:8). 'Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying: "A great prophet has arisen among us!"' and 'God has visited his people' (Luke 7:16). The profound impression made upon the people by the last and most amazing miracle, the raising of Lazarus, was the reason why they accompanied Christ in triumphal procession to Jerusalem and acclaimed him as their Messiah: 'The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign' (John 12:18). Therefore the disciples on the way to Emmaus, remembering the impression made by the life and activity of Christ, said: 'Jesus of Nazareth ... was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people' (Luke 24:19).

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[1] As hyperbole is a characteristically human way of speaking, Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* declare that its use is not contrary to the truth nor unfitting in expressing the holiness of God, and occurs even in the Book written under divine inspiration; cf. E.B. 559.

Moreover Jesus himself said that he had performed miracles never seen before: 'If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin ...' (John 15:24).

(3) So far we have been considering in general those of Christ's 'works' which were 'signs and miracles'. But the Constitution tells us that what Christ achieved through his works in general he achieved in a special manner through his death and resurrection from the dead and finally through his sending of the Holy Spirit. These manifestations come more under the heading of 'works' than 'signs and miracles'. The resurrection of Christ is certainly a sign and a miracle, the greatest and most decisive of all (cf. Matt. 12:39-40; 16:4; Luke 11:29-30), and perhaps the gift of the Holy Spirit might be considered in the same category, but not the death of Christ. These three events are works by which God reveals himself to men and Christ's message is delivered. We shall speak of them more fully later on.

The good news

Let us now consider the revelation which Christ brought to us. In what does it consist? The Constitution tells us that Christ fulfils and perfects revelation and that 'God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life' (no. 4). These words constitute a brief synthesis of the revelation of God in Christ.

(1) It is easy to show how this synthesis is interwoven with biblical expressions and thoughts. In Christ, says St Paul, God 'has delivered us from the dominion of darkness, and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (Col. 1:13-14). This work of God is of a complex nature, with what might be called a 'negative side', that is, liberation from the darkness of sin and from its 'wages' (its consequences) which are spiritual and corporal death (cf. Rom. 6:26). Both of these, sin and its consequences, are described metaphorically by the Council as 'darkness'.[2] So it is said that Christ came like sunlight 'to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace' (Luke 1:78-79; cf. Matt. 4:16). Referring to our condition before we were liberated by Christ, St Paul wrote: 'And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passion of our flesh, following the desires of the body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind'

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[2] It is well known that there are several meanings attached to the word 'darkness' in Holy Scripture. Here the Council is using it in the sense of evil works and sin (cf. Eph. 5:8, 11; Rom. 13:12; I Thess. 5:5; I John 1:5, 2:11). Elsewhere, Holy Scripture speaks of the 'power of darkness', or the 'power of the devil' (cf. Luke 22:53; Eph. 6:11; Col. 1:13), since the devil is the originator of sin and holds the power of death (cf. Heb. 2:14).

(Eph. 2:1-3). And again: 'Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord . . .' (Eph. 5:8).

(2) The darkness of sin and death is closely connected with a dark and mysterious personage, 'he who has the power of death, that is, the devil' (Heb. 2:14), whose envy caused death to enter the world (cf. Wisdom 2:24). Therefore Christ's mission is, in this respect, presented as an attempt to destroy the works of the devil: 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil' (I John 3:8). And the consequence of Christ's passion was in fact the expulsion of the ruler of this world (cf. John 12:31). So the 'negative' or destructive results of his mission, to which we alluded in our second chapter when we explained the expression 'access to the Father' are here further illustrated. It is not merely a question of enabling man to share in the divine nature. He must also be freed from sin and death, and from the devil who rules death's dark kingdom. The negative aspect of our condition, before Christ, is remedied by redemption, which first of all brings about the remission of sin (cf. Luke 1:77; 24:46; Col. 1:14).

(3) Concerning the positive aspect of redemption St Paul writes: 'For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night, or of darkness' (I Thess. 5:5). The symbols of eternal life are light and day. In fact, St Peter tells us that God called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (cf. I Peter 2:9). And so we have become 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (*ibid.*). 'Even when we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up through him and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:5-6). This life is none other than that sharing in the divine nature, that communion or fellowship with God, of which we spoke more fully in the second chapter.

The works manifest and confirm the good news

In speaking of revelation in general, the Council had stated the principle that the 'deeds and words' through which revelation comes are intimately connected, so that the works wrought by God in the history of salvation 'manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them' (no. 2). How is this general principle to be applied to the revelation of God in Christ? The Constitution gives a general answer to this question, saying that through the various works, which it lists, Christ 'completed and perfected revelation and confirmed it with divine testimony'. Note that it does not say that the works serve only to confirm the revelation with divine testimony, by impressing the seal of divine authority upon Christ's words, but says they are *also* the instrument by means of which Christ 'completes and perfects revelation'. In other words, they serve also to reveal the content of revelation, that is, 'they reveal and confirm the doctrine and the realities signified by the words'. One must now try to explain: (1) in what way the works serve to support with divine authority Christ's mission and his preaching; (2) in what way they reveal the truths proclaimed by Christ. This enquiry will enable us to acquire a more profound understanding of the life and activity of Christ, both in their details and also in the connection between these and the good news which he brings to us.

(1) There is no need to insist much upon this first point, namely, that Christ's works set the seal of divine authority upon his mission and preaching. This is the aspect which is generally most stressed, so here we will treat it briefly. The conversation between Jesus and the crowd, after the miracle of the loaves, is significant. The people ask Jesus: 'What sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform?' Christ does not refuse to give them a sign; indeed he considers his multiplication of the loaves to be such a sign and he affirms that by this 'has God the Father set his seal [on the Son]' (John 6:30, 27). Elsewhere Christ again repeatedly refers to his works when he asks for faith in his mission and preaching: 'If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe

me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father' (John 10:37-38). That is why he says elsewhere that the incredulity of the Jews was inexcusable: 'If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father' (John 15:24). He affirmed that his disciples also would be given power to work similar miracles in order to authenticate their preaching: 'And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover' (Mark 16:17-18). The Jews too thought in the same way. After Jesus had driven the merchants out of the temple they asked him: 'What sign have you to show us for doing this?' (John 2:18), that is: How do you prove you have authority to do what you have done? And, referring to his mission in general, they asked: 'Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you' (Matt. 12:38).[3]

(2) It is very important for us, for the purposes of our present study, to show how the works of Christ not only set the seal of authority upon his mission but clarified his message. As a general rule, this aspect is less frequently expounded. Here we can give but a few characteristic examples.

(a) Let us begin with the numerous miracles of healing. We will not follow certain exegetical schools or explanations which treat the gospel stories as allegories, and give a particular significance to every kind of illness. Nevertheless it is certain that there exists a profound connection between the cure of bodily ailments and the spiritual healing from sin. The gospels themselves point this out. The evangelist Matthew who, as is well known, frequently indicates the fulfilment of the prophecies in the various events of the life of Christ, writes about the healing miracles: 'That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isiah: 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases' (Matt. 8:16-17). Now it is certain that the prophetic utterance quoted by the evangelist is taken from the well known Song of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah, which speaks of what the Messiah will do to atone for the sins of men and free them from their burden. In fact, towards the end of the Song, God himself speaks: 'The righteous one, my servant, shall make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities' (Isaiah 53:11). So for St Matthew the cure of bodily ailments is a symbol of Christ healing men from the evil of sin.

(b) Let us give a few details. We have already seen in the second chapter that physical blindness is a symbol of spiritual blindness. Let us now consider another kind of 'work' performed by Christ, the liberation of people possessed by the devil. Of this work Christ himself said: 'If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you' (Luke 11:20). In fact, the Kingdom of God which Christ proclaims and brings to us has, as we have seen, also the effect of overpowering the devil and destroying his works (cf. I John 3:8), of destroying 'him who has the power of death, that is, the devil', and of delivering 'all those who through fear of death were subject to life-long bondage' (Heb. 2:14-15). One of the chief consequences of the passion of Christ was to be the casting out of the prince of this world (cf. John 12:31). For these reasons the healing of the people who were possessed by devils shows that the Kingdom of God has come, by means of which God 'has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son' (Col. 1:13).

(c) Finally, the resurrection of the dead. In order to understand that in the mind of Christ the resurrection of the body and the spiritual resurrection from sin are closely associated, it is enough to consider some of Christ's words in the gospel

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[3] Matt. 12:38; cf. also John 9:16. When Christ rebukes the Jews for looking for signs as confirmation, he is not condemning the principle or the method, but their abuse, that is, the Jews' passion for seeing new, extraordinary and spectacular things, without drawing the logical consequences — without believing (cf. Matt. 12:39; John 6:26; etc.).

of St John. Speaking of his union with the Father Christ says: 'As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will . . . truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself . . .' (John 5:21, 25-26). It is clear that Christ is speaking of spiritual resurrection through faith if we compare his words with those which follow, when he is speaking of the resurrection of the body: 'Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice [the voice of the Son of Man] and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment' (John 5:28-29). In the second chapter we have already seen that Christ himself interpreted the resurrection of Lazarus as the expression of the truth that he, Christ, was the resurrection and the life. So the miracles, by means of which Christ raises the dead, express the truth of the eternal life which Christ brought to mankind.

These few examples must suffice. They enable us to perceive something of the great wealth of doctrine which is latent, not only in the words but also in the works of Jesus. If we can but understand them, they will reveal to us many of the secrets of God and, as they are deeds, they will do so in a concrete manner, thus 'confirming the doctrine and revealing the truths signified by the words'. Obviously we must proceed in this field with great care and caution. To emphasize the fact that Christ's works were used to reveal his doctrine does not mean that we are denying that these deeds were actually performed. If we did we should be depriving revelation of the support of that very power which is inherent in deeds. The whole point of them is that they present the teaching not in a concrete manner, 'incarnated', as it were, in events. Nor must we, in emphasizing how deeds clarify words, be led to exaggerate the clarification by treating the deeds as allegories. Obviously it is not always easy to grasp the significance of this or that event. The very fact that the events and deeds have this significance

is clearly attested by Christ and the apostles. In seeking the significance of the individual 'works' we are not speculating about the actual occurrences in order to trace some mysterious meaning in them; we are rather trying to gather from the closest possible study of Scripture—of the whole of Scripture—the profound meanings, which Christ himself, through the Spirit, who inspired The Bible, has given to these manifestations of power.

Death, resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit

The Council assigns a very special importance to these fundamental facts of Christ's life, saying that he perfects and fulfils revelation '*especially* through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth'. So we may now ask in what way these events reveal what the Council calls the essence of Christ's resurrection.

(1) Let us begin with his death and resurrection. The soteriological meaning of these two events has been, as is well known, particularly studied by St Paul. He underlines, first of all, a general connection between the death and resurrection of Christ and liberation from sin: 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins' (I Cor. 15:17); Christ was 'put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25). Then the apostle explains his thoughts, speaking of the justification of man by faith through baptism: 'I, through the law, died to the law, that I might live to God; I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:19-20). This is what happens to every Christian by faith through baptism. He explains at more length in the letter to the Romans: 'How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin' (Rom. 6:2-6). And in the letter to the Ephesians the apostle says, emphasizing the more positive aspect—that of new life: 'even when we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ' (Eph. 2:5-6).

(2) One last point: the Constitution speaks of the sending of the Holy Spirit as one of the works by which Christ, in a 'special' way completes and perfects revelation. In what way does this extraordinary event clarify the truth that 'God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us to eternal life' (no. 4)? Certainly the sending of the Holy Spirit has also an immediate significance, which was explained by Christ himself before he ascended into heaven: 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8). And this testimony which the apostles render to Christ with their preaching is intimately connected with the forgiveness of sins, that is with liberation from the darkness of sin. In fact, in his last appearance to the apostles after his resurrection, Jesus explained: 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer ... and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem' (Luke 24:46-49). But apart from this immediate significance there is a vaster meaning, more closely connected with the essence of Christ's revelation, in as much as liberation from sin and the bestowal of eternal life are in the New Testament said to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Already, talking with Nicodemus, Jesus had said: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:5-6). In the same sense St Paul explained that the total transformation of man, by means of which he is freed from sin and born again to eternal life, is to be attributed to the Holy Spirit: God has saved us 'in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life' (Titus 3:5-7; cf. Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:27).

The Holy Spirit remains the inspiration of new life in the man who has been born again: 'But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness' (Rom. 8:9-10). This same Spirit, as we have seen in our second chapter gives the baptized the surety that they are the children of God, he gives them a filial affection for God (cf. Gal. 4:6-7; Rom. 8:15), instructs them (cf. I John 2:27), guides them (Rom. 8:14), prays in them and for them (cf. Rom. 8:26-27). Finally, the Spirit enables them fully to share in eternal life in the final resurrection: 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you' (Rom. 8:11).

For these reasons the visible sending of the Holy Spirit signifies that the work of freeing men and raising them to a new life has entered the phase of active realization, which is characteristic of the all-powerful and irrestible action of the Spirit of God.

When we see Christ we see the Father

The search for the profound meaning of these events must not be restricted only to the 'signs and miracles'. The whole life of Christ must be studied, for the simple reason that he is the God-Man, the only begotten Son of God who became man.

That is why he said at the Last Supper: 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say: "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?' (John 14:9-10). Therefore the Constitution asserts that Christ perfects and completes revelation, by his very presence and by showing himself to men. In fact the Council gives pre-eminence to this means of perfecting and completing revelation. Here it is clear that, in Christ, God is Emmanuel, 'God with us' (cf. Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), not in a general sense, as when he was speaking and working in the Old Testament, but personally present in his only begotten Son, in whom the 'whole fulness of deity dwells bodily' (Col. 2:9). So Christ may also say: 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me' (John 7:16); and elsewhere: 'The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works' (John 14:10).[4]

From what we have just said the fulness of Christ's message appears in all its profound meaning—'God is with us.' This message brings us not only the divine love and assistance but a personal presence. In Christ, the incarnate Word, is the Holy Trinity, present among men. The Word is present, having been made man; the Father is present because Christ is one with the Father, so that whoever sees him sees the Father, and where he is the Father too is present; and finally the Holy Spirit is here too, as the Spirit of the Father and the Son. This presence is so real that Christ can express in the same terms his own union with the Father, and his presence and union with men. It is enough to remember the words of Christ's high priestly prayer! He prays: 'That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us. . . . The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one' (John 17:21-23). In Christ and through Christ mankind is linked with close supernatural bonds to God. This is the final and profound sense of that sharing in the divine nature and communion of life with God himself, of which the Constitution speaks (no. 2) and which we have expounded in the second chapter.

The final Covenant between God and mankind

What we have seen concerning revelation in Christ will enable us to understand another and final characteristic element in the New Covenant, namely, that this is the final revelation, God's last word to men. 'The Christian dispensation', says the Constitution, 'as the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. I Tim. 6:14; Titus 2:13)' (no. 4).

(1) It is easy to find biblical confirmation of this assertion. The letter to the Hebrews, echoing the repeated affirmations of the Old Testament and referring to the Covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus, speaks of 'the blood of the eternal Covenant' (Heb. 13:20; cf. Isaiah 55:3; Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 37:26). Let us remember moreover various texts which illustrate particular aspects of this doctrine. Christ promises the apostles 'Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age' (Matt. 28:20). The letter to the Hebrews explains the priesthood of Christ and asserts its immutable and eternal character: Christ, 'holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb. 7:24-25).

(2) The conclusion we have reached with regard to the defi-

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[4] This gives rise to a most important practical consequence. Every detail of Christ's life, every gesture, look or word is all of the greatest significance and must be received and examined with holy eagerness, with the powerful impulse of the soul desirous of knowing God and entering into communion with him. Because he is the same 'God who said: "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (II Cor. 4:6). While we thus contemplate the glory of the Lord in Christ 'we are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit' (*ibid.* 3:18).

nitive character of the Christian revelation is confirmed by an examination of New Testament doctrine in general. We think particularly of the characteristic concepts of the 'last day', the 'last hour' and other similar expressions. They reflect the biblical concept of the prophets and of the New Testament, according to which the messianic age, which will conclude with the 'day of the Lord', that is, the last judgment of the whole world, is indeed the final age of the world. Now this period begins, always according to the prophets and the New Testament, with the first coming of the Messiah; in fact the times in which he was born bear some of the characteristic signs of the 'last days'. In this connection there is a significant passage in which St Peter explains the events of the day of Penecost by referring to the prophet Joel who describes the 'last days' and concludes his description with the announcement of the 'great and manifest day of the Lord', that is, the day of judgment (cf. Acts 2:17-20). Therefore in his first letter St Peter says that Christ 'was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times' (Peter 1:20); and in the same letter he affirms: 'The end of all things is at hand' (*ibid.*, 4:7). St Paul also says that the Old Testament was 'written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come' (I Cor. 10:11). And St John writes in his letter: 'Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour' (I John 2:18). Just as St John warns that, as a sign of the last days, there are already many Antichrists, so various writers in the New Testament warn the faithful of the dangers they will incur 'in the last days', dangers of being led astray, and so on (cf. II Tim. 3:1-6; II Peter 3:3; Jude 18). Evidently they give this warning so that the faithful may be on their guard against these dangers, thus implying that the last days are already here. This New Testament teaching is amply expounded by the *Constitution on the Church* which speaks of the eschatalogical character of the Church and of the 'final age of the world', asserting: 'The final age of the world has already come upon us (cf. I Cor. 10:11). The renovation of the world has been irrevocably decreed and in this present age is already actually at hand' (no. 48).

(3) Moreover, in Christ's doctrine we have already been shown a whole cycle of events leading up to what Scripture calls 'the end' (cf. I Cor. 15:24). This cycle is fully and clearly described in the *Constitution on the Church*. It is enough to quote the relevant paragraph, especially as it is interwoven with biblical texts, so that the biblical foundations of the doctrine are clearly evident: 'For before we reign with the glorious Christ, all of us will be made manifest "before the tribunal of Christ, so that each one may receive what he has won through the body, according to his works, whether good or evil" (II Cor. 5:10). At the end of the world, "they who have done good shall come forth unto resurrection of life; but they who have done evil unto resurrection of judgment" (John 5:29; cf. Matt. 25:46).

'We reckon therefore that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18; cf. II Tim. 2:11-12). Strong in faith, we look for "the blessed hope and glorious coming of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13), "who will refashion the body of our lowliness, conforming it to the body of his glory" (Phil. 3:21) and who will come "to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all those who have believed" (II Thess. 1:10)' (no. 48).

(4) Let us now consider a third characteristic concept: the 'day of the Lord', that is the day of judgment, which from the Old Testament onwards is represented as the solemn and final conclusion of the story of mankind.[5]

On that day 'when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats' (Matt. 25:31-32). 'For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment' (John 5:26-29). Then, after explaining the principle of his justice, Christ concludes: 'And they [the wicked] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life' (Matt. 25:49). St Paul tells us more about the 'end' of the world. After having spoken at length about the resurrection of the dead, he continues: 'Then comes the end, when he delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet"' (I Cor. 15:24-28).

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[5] Cf. for example: Wis. 2:4-15; Ezek. 7:6-7; Dan. 9:26; 11:27; 12:13; Psalms 93, 94, 96-99; I Thess. 4:16-17; 5:2; II Thess. 2:2-4; 1 Cor. 3:13; 15:24-28; II Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 6:17, 16:15.

The best way of concluding this chapter is to suggest a comparison between what the Council has said in the Constitution we are studying (no. 2) about the revelation in general, and what it says (nos. 3 and 4) about the history of salvation. Speaking generally, it is obvious that the history of salvation constitutes the fulfilment of that divine purpose of salvation which was explained in paragraph 2. So the means by which God reveals himself are seen to be transposed on to the plane of history. This is first apparent in the life of the parents of the human race, and from then onwards it becomes increasingly clear and precise, until the full revelation appears in Christ, for Christ is God himself in person, and in him God is present, speaking to men through his only begotten Son, the Word made flesh. The kindness and generosity shown by the invisible God when he condescends to speak to men as to friends, and hold converse with them, reach a supreme culmination in Christ because he is God's only begotten Son, the Word, who becomes man, and is like any other man, except that he is without sin. So, in his only begotten Son, God not only speaks to men and holds converse with them, but dwells among them as one of them, sharing their lives, even their most bitter and humiliating experience, death. Indeed his death becomes one of the most valid means of revealing God to men. In this way God speaks to men in a human way; he reveals his secret purposes to them, in authentically human speech. God is revealed in the very fact of the presence and manifestation among men of the Word made flesh.

As regards the benefits man receives from divine revelation: access to the Father, participation in the divine nature and communion of life with God himself—they can be summed up as man's liberation from the darkness of sin and death, his resurrection to eternal life, and the establishment of an eternal and definitive Covenant between God and mankind.

The 'events and words' of which God makes use in revealing himself to men become ever more clear and frequent, in the history of salvation, until in Christ they attain a splendour and grandeur never seen before. He speaks as no man ever spoke before. He accomplishes miracles with unheard of prodigality. In fact, his whole life becomes a unique revelation of God, reaching its culmination in the decisive events of his death and resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

So, as we conclude our study of the history of salvation, Christ truly appears to us as the Mediator and fulfilment of the whole revelation of God. He is the fulness of revelation because in him and through him the Holy Trinity is present, not only as a means of divine love and assistance, but as Persons. With him and through him mankind, by an undeserved gift of God, is joined with close supernatural bonds to God himself, because Christ is in men, and the Father in Christ, so man in Christ is one with God and in God (cf. John 17:21-22).

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Man's response

God has then conceived a great purpose for mankind, offering to men 'divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind' (no. 6). In order to realize it he has gradually revealed himself to men, teaching them about himself and his plan of salvation until the time came when the 'light of the world' (John 8:12), Christ himself, appeared and began to give light to the whole human race. Now it is for man, faced with the unbelievable condescension of the loving God, to decide how he should behave in response to such a gift. What ought he to do to answer God's invitation and to be admitted to a living communion with him (cf. no. 2)? What chances has he of welcoming the divine revelation and how can he do so? The next part of our document deals with these important and decisive questions, pointing out the essence of man's response, which consists in the obedience of faith; it then explains the elements of this response and finally emphasizes the fact that faith is, both in its first realization and in its further development, the fruit of grace, i.e. of the freely given help of God.

The obedience of faith is owed to God who reveals himself

The Constitution's reply to the first and most important question of what attitude man ought to adopt in the face of God's revelation is short but deeply thought out: ' "The obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26; cf. Rom. 1:5; II Cor. 10:5-6) must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering him "full submission of intellect and will" and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him' (no. 5). As is obvious, the document starts from the typical New Testament, or more precisely pauline, concept of

'the obedience of faith'. This concept expresses the essential part of man's response. All the rest of what the document says is nothing but a detailed analysis and explanation of this New Testament concept. We shall consider therefore first of all the data of the New Testament in the various biblical texts in which they occur; then we shall give our attention to the detailed explanation of them given in the Constitution.

(1) St Paul speaks in the letter to the Romans of 'the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the eternal God . . .' (Rom. 16:25-26). The purpose of this revelation of the mystery to the nations is this: 'to bring about the obedience of faith' (*ibid.*).[1] It is clear that this text answers our question exactly. The mystery 'which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed' is clearly that same 'mystery of the will of God' (cf. Eph. 1:9) with which the chapter of the conciliar document which we are now expounding begins (cf. no. 2). Therefore that mystery of the saving will of God has been brought to men's notice in order that they may accept it obediently. Here are some other texts on the same subject. The apostle Paul received grace and apostleship for the very purpose of bringing about 'the obedience of faith for the sake of his [Christ's] name among all the nations' (Rom. 1:5; cf. 15:18).[2] In another text the apostle speaks of the

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[1] It is from this same pauline text that the Constitution has taken the expression 'the obedience of faith' which corresponds to the Greek *hypakoē pisteōs*. The relevant words of the pauline text just quoted, literally translated, would read: 'for the purpose of obedience to the faith', where the term 'faith' most probably means the gospel as it is preached. Of the exact meaning of this biblical expression and of the use made of it in the Constitution we shall speak in the following note.

[2] In Greek *eis hypakoēn pisteōs*. (1) With regard to the exact sense of this expression in the New Testament, let us remember what we have already referred to above in speaking of its use in Rom. 16:26: that the meaning of the expression is 'submission to the faith', i.e. to the gospel as preached. Such an explanation is supported by the great majority of exegetes. The reason for this explanation is that in the texts in which the corresponding verb *hypakouein* is used the complement indicates the person or thing to which obedience is offered or to which we submit ourselves (cf. Rom. 10:16 'to obey the gospel'; Acts 6:7: 'they were obedient to the faith'; so also the substantive *hypakoē* [*tou*

powerful 'weapons' of his preaching, which are aimed against 'every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God' and 'take every thought captive to obey Christ' (II Cor. 10:5). So also the acts of the Apostles, when speaking of the actual results of preaching, talk of the obedient submission to faith: 'And the word of God increased: and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7). St Paul writes to the Romans: 'Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed' (Rom. 6:17). Elsewhere again he has to admit sadly: 'They have not all heeded the gospel' (Rom. 10:16).

Christou] in 2 Cor. 10:5 clearly means obedience or submission offered to Christ). The Vulgate also seems to understand the expression in this sense, translating it *ad obœdiendum fidei* (Rom. 1:5), an expression which can only be intended in the sense of obedience to the faith (that is to the gospel, cf. Acts 6:7). Further, in Rom. 16:26 the use of the verbal noun *obœditionum* instead of the usual *obœdientia* suggests that the translator was thinking more of obedience rendered to the faith.

(2) In what sense does the conciliar document make use of the expression *obœditio fidei*? The context seems rather more in favour of the interpretation 'the obedience of faith', that is, that particular form of obedience which is the property of faith (so *fidei* would be the genitive which the exegetes call 'epesegetic', that is the genitive which qualifies the word on which it depends and which precedes it). In fact the Constitution contains the explanation of the various elements of faith: submission of the intellect and of the will, etc. Furthermore, the following sentence, beginning with the words *quae fides* seems to show that the authors already had in mind, as the subject of the preceding sentence, not the concept of obedience but that of faith.

This explanation we have given seems to be confirmed by the fact that the expression *obœditio* is currently translated in various modern languages—Italian, German, French, English—*not* by 'obedience *to* the faith', which would correspond to the original Greek expression, but by 'obedience *of* faith', which corresponds to the way in which we have explained the meaning of the expression in our document.

It is thus necessary to say that our document, by using a characteristic New Testament expression, emphasizes, at this point, that element of faith which is obedience, and then later, when considering the text as a whole intends, simply the concept of faith expressed in the New Testament by the Greek word *pistis* corresponding to the verb *pisteuein*. In this sense, in spite of the different use of the biblical expression *obœditio fidei*, the doctrine propounded here by our document must undoubtedly be considered as corresponding simply to the *general* doctrine of the New Testament, as will be seen later.

(2) What is the particular content of this obedience of faith? Our document describes it as an attitude by which 'man entrusts his whole self obediently to God, offering "the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals", and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him' (no. 5). It is most important to be quite clear about the scope and complexity of the act of faith.

(b) Let us emphasize first of all that with faith 'man entrusts his whole self to God'. There is certainly no need to deny that in this obedience there is also an act of the intellect and of the will (as we shall see later), but on the other hand we must not reduce it to a mere act of the intellect, or even to an act of the will. With faith 'man entrusts his whole self to God'. It is not just a question of accepting a doctrine as true, nor yet of simply accepting this or that religious practice. The purpose of God's revelation is to make a man his son by adoption, and to admit him to fellowship with himself (cf. no. 2). Now this concerns the whole of a man's life and existence in time and in eternity. The all-embracing character of faith clearly appears in him who is the prototype of our faith: Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). In fact from the Old Testament comes the clearest evidence that his faith completely transformed the life of the patriarch, giving him a new purpose and a totally new significance (cf. Gen. 12-18). The same is true of us. To believe means to accept God's whole plan, to allow one's own life to be transformed and given a definite significance and direction.

It is a fact that in the New Testament texts, which speak of the obedience of faith, this appears to us to be the question of life or death for man. To anyone who obeys in this way, obedience brings eternal salvation. It is said in the letter to the Hebrews that Christ 'became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a High Priest after the order of Melchisedek' (Heb. 5:9-10). Christ the Priest brings about the salvation of men, but only on condition that they obey him in faith.

On the other hand the refusal to obey brings punishment: eternal ruin: 'The Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven [on the day of judgment] with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might' (II Thess. 1:7-9). So Jesus, when he explains the parable of the sower, explains that in the case of a certain class of men 'the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved' (Luke 8:12). As this salvation is a matter of life and death, so also is the acceptance in faith, or the rejection, of the word of God who reveals himself. So it is that the ending of St Mark's gospel says categorically: 'He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:16).

(b) In addition to stressing the all-embracing character of faith, we must also emphasize—against those who want to re-restrict it to a credulous abandonment of man to God, without full assent to revelation—that it also includes the acceptance of the truth contained in revelation. It is in this sense that Jesus requires us to show our faith in him: 'If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works' (John 10:37-38). Thus faith is related to an object, a well-defined truth: 'Believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father' (John 10:38). Similarly, in the conversation with Martha before the raising of Lazarus, Jesus requires her to have faith in his words: 'I am the resurrection and the life: he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live' (John 11:25). St Paul also, when he speaks of faith, often mentions its object: 'Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep' (I Thess. 4:14). And again: 'If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him' (Rom. 6:8-9). In this last text the expression 'we know that Christ...' is particularly noteworthy for it indicates the connection between faith and that knowledge, which is derived from revelation and based upon it. Such a connection is not infrequent in St Paul: 'We know that the judgment of God rightly falls...' (Rom. 2:2); 'We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him...' (Rom. 8:28; cf. I Cor. 3:16; Gal. 2:16; I Thess. 5:2; etc.). Let these texts suffice to support a thesis which is self evident—provided that in the explanation of the act of faith we avoid exaggerations and one-sided affirmations of the element of trust and abandonment (which is certainly contained in it). Indeed all the full, detailed and gradual manifestation of God throughout the centuries before the coming of the light of the world, would have neither meaning nor purpose, if its acceptance as true were not the basis of man's essential abandonment to God, an abandonment which is precisely the obedience of faith.

Faith is a free act

A fuller consideration of the part which the will plays in the obedience of faith is now called for. On this question our document, besides affirming that with faith 'man entrusts his whole self freely to God' adds, in the words of the First Vatican Council, that in faith man renders to God 'the full submission of intellect and will . . . freely assenting to the truth revealed by him'.

(1) What are the biblical proofs of the free character of the act of faith? The part which the will and its freedom play in faith is implicitly shown in the biblical concept of faith as obedience, which we have already expounded. Indeed, the New Testament does not conceive of obedience except as a free submission to God, and that is why it may be considered as meritorious in God's eyes. The New Testament concept of faith as free submission to God explains the New Testament assertion that God is greatly pleased by man's faith. This pleasure is repeatedly emphasized in the example of Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:3-22; Gal. 3:9; Heb. 11:8-19). St Paul even speaks at times of the 'work

of faith' (I Thess. 1:3; II Thess. 1:11) as of an action that has a special meritorious value before God. The conviction that faith is a free act also causes the New Testament to take into account the possibility that man may refuse to submit and believe, although indeed such a refusal is considered a great sin with very grave penalties attached to it in order to warn man against it.

The freedom of the act of faith has been amply expounded, as is well known, in the conciliar *Declaration on Religious Freedom.* Explanations of this key document provide the best commentary on the scriptural references we have just listed and on the assertions of the Constitution about the freedom of the act of faith. A certain amount of quotation from that Declaration seems justified, both because of the very great authority of the document and also because these elucidations of the Council do no more than gather together the facts and sayings contained in Holy Scripture. Hence these quotations, besides expounding the doctrine of the Church, also explain its scriptural foundations.

(2) With regard to the act of faith, the Declaration states: 'It is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man's response to God in faith must be free. Therefore no one is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will. This doctrine is contained in the word of God and it was constantly proclaimed by the Fathers of the Church. The act of faith is of its very nature a free act. Man, redeemed by Christ the Saviour and through Jesus Christ called to be God's adopted son, cannot give his adherence to God revealing himself unless the Father draw him to offer to God the reasonable and free submission of faith' (no. 10).

In its second chapter the *Declaration on Religious Freedom,* with a view to pointing out the basis which the doctrine of religious freedom has in revelation, honestly admits that revelation does not explicitly affirm the Conciliar definition of religious freedom as 'the right of man to immunity from external coercion in matters religious'. The document however adds that revelation nevertheless discloses its deep roots, in so much as

it 'discloses the dignity of the human person in its full dimensions, giving evidence of the respect which Christ showed towards the freedom with which man is to fulfil his duty of belief in the word of God. It gives us lessons too in the spirit which disciples of such a master ought to make their own and to follow in every situation' (no. 9). Yet before explaining this respect shown by Christ, his own attitude and that of the apostles, the Council draws attention to the way in which God himself acts: 'God calls men to serve him in spirit and in truth. Hence they are bound in conscience but they stand under no compulsion. God has regard for the dignity of the human person whom he himself created: man is guided by his own judgment and he is to enjoy freedom' (no. 11).

The Council continues: 'This truth appears at its height in Christ Jesus, in whom God perfectly manifested himself and his ways with men. Christ is our master and Lord. He is also meek and humble of heart (cf. Matt. 11:29). And in attracting and inviting his disciples he acted patiently (cf. Matt. 11:28-30; John 6:67-68). He refused to be a political Messiah ruling by force (cf. Matt. 4:8-10; John 6:15); he preferred to call himself the Son of Man who was 'to serve and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). He showed himself the perfect servant of God (cf. Is. 42:1-4); 'a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking wick he will not quench' (Matt. 12:20). In the end, when he completed on the cross the work of redemption whereby he won salvation and true freedom for men, he also brought his revelation to completion. He bore witness to the truth (cf. John 18:37), but he refused to impose the truth by force on those who spoke against it. Not by force of blows does his rule assert its claims (cf. Matt. 26:51-53; John 18:36). Rather it is established by hearing the truth and by witnessing to it and it extends its dominion by the love whereby Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws all men to himself (cf. John 12:32)' (no. 11).

The apostles behaved in the same way. 'Taught by the word and example of Christ, the apostles followed the same way. From the very origins of the Church the disciples of Christ strove to convert men to faith in Christ as the Lord—not, however, by the use of coercion or by devices unworthy of the gospel, but by the power, above all, of the word of God (cf. I Cor. 2:3-5; I Thess. 2:3-5). Steadfastly they proclaimed to all the plan of God our Saviour, "who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). At the same time however they showed respect for weaker souls even though these persons were in error. Thus they made it plain that "every one of us will render an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12; cf. Rom. 14:1-23; I Cor. 8:9-13; 10:23-33), and for this reason is bound to obey his conscience.

'Like Christ himself the apostles were unceasingly intent upon bearing witness to the truth of God. They showed special courage in speaking "the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31; cf. Eph. 6:19-20) before the people and their rulers. With a firm faith they held that the gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (cf. Rom. 1:16). Therefore they rejected all "carnal weapons" (cf. II Cor. 10:4; I Thess. 5:8-9). They followed the example of the gentleness and humility of Christ. And they preached the word of God in the full confidence that this word itself possessed a divine power able to destroy all the forces arrayed against God (cf. Eph. 11:17) and to bring men in faith to Christ and to his service (cf. II Cor. 10:3-5)' (*ibid.*). On the attitude of the Church of today to these questions cf. *Missions*, no. 13.

(3) Let us add a detailed consideration of the meaning of this freedom. Today there is sometimes a fear of emphasizing man's very grave duty to believe in a God who reveals himself, as though this emphasis denoted an attempt to influence others and to impose undue pressure upon them, and therefore indicated a lack of respect for man's freedom. So it is thought to indicate even less respect for man's freedom of choice if one points out to him the grave consequences (including eternal punishment) which may result from a refusal to believe. However one must say as clearly and frankly as possible that this fear

was not found in the sayings of Christ and his apostles, nor in the way they acted.

(a) In this matter, we may think of the grave reproofs and threats that Christ addressed to his favourite cities of Galilee, Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum (cf. Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 10:13-15), to the threats uttered against the city of Jerusalem (cf. Luke 19:41-44), and to those directed in general against the chosen people and their leaders (cf. Matt. 23:33-36; Luke 13:34-35).[3] We can recall, too, the threats that Christ uttered against any cities which might reject the apostles' preaching (cf. Matt. 10:15; Luke 10:12) and against anyone who should deny him before men (cf. Matt. 10:33).

(b) The apostles acted in a similar way. They preached the good news, but with the utmost gravity. It is interesting to note that the announcement of judgment is among the essential points of the preaching of the gospel.[4] The proclamation of judgment is linked with the proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ in two characteristic texts. In the acts it is related that Felix came with Drusilla his wife, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and desired 'to hear him speak upon faith in Christ Jesus'. Then the author of the acts adds: 'As he [Paul] argued about justice and self-control and future judgment, Felix was alarmed and said "Go away for the present; when I have an opportunity I will summon you"' (Acts 24:35). The proclamation of the judgment was thus an integral part of the preaching of faith in Jesus Christ. In the letter to the Hebrews we read: 'Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment' (Heb. 6:1-2). According to these words the doctrine of eternal judgment was one of the 'elementary doctrines of Christ'—meaning a fundamental one. In the same way, in the letter to the Romans, St Paul, after having said: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone that has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek', no more than two verses later begins to speak of the manifestation of the wrath of God: 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth' (Rom. 1:16, 18). The basic reason for this attitude of the apostles is that the thought of judgment is one of the strongest motives, though not the only one for achieving that indispensable condition for entering the Kingdom of God, 'penitence', in other words interior repentance and newness of life (cf. Matt. 3: 2-12; 4:17; Acts 2:38; 17:30).

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[3] On the exact meaning of these threats and of their fulfilment in history see Bea, *The Church and the Jewish People*, Chapman, London, 1966.

[4] Cf. Acts 10:42; 24:24-25; Rom. 2:16; Christ will judge men 'according to my gospel', says St Paul; in the light of these texts the same meaning is more than probable in Acts 17:31 also.

(c) How are we to explain the severity of the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, wherein they even make use of the threat of eternal judgment? It is because that teaching is ultimately dictated by the love of man, and love is a very grave matter and does not turn its back on any means permitted and appropriate for promoting the good of the beloved person. And in this case we are not concerned with just any sort of good, but with a good which is a question of life and death for man. Note however the qualification 'permitted and appropriate'. Now threats of punishment are good means and suitable for the desired end. As we have seen above in the gospel, unlike the many and varied forms of punishment and chastisement found in certain totalitarian systems, they are only a very serious human way of insisting that man shall become aware of his real position and of his responsibilities and so resolve to follow the way appropriate to his true and lasting good.[5]

Here is another consideration. Since the apostles and the Church preach in the name of God and therefore proclaim the divine judgment and its sanctions in his name, there arises the question of God's own attitude to man's freedom; in other words, we ask whether the proclamation of judgment made by God through the Church does not involve a coercion of man and hence an infringement of his right to take decisions freely. A first answer is the one we have already given: men do not consider it an infringement of their freedom of choice if the serious consequences of that choice are pointed out to them with all earnestness. Indeed they consider this necessary and beneficial, so that they may make their choice with full knowledge. There is therefore the same need to speak openly when God by means of the Church points out to men the very grave consequences of refusing to believe and to offer to God the obedience of faith. This is an advantage to man. God grants him such an advantage, not only because of his love for man, but also for his own sake. Having created man free and desiring that man should freely accept his revelation and so enter into fellowship with him, God is bound to make use of every means to persuade man to do what is necessary on his side to implement the plan, that is, to offer to God the obedience of faith. The expression of the earnestness with which God pursues the eternal well-being and salvation of man includes the terrible threat of eternal ruin, which awaits him who deliberately refuses to believe the gospel. By refusing to believe, a man freely and deliberately refuses to share in the divine life and in the fellowship of life with God. It is therefore the man himself who chooses such damnation. In this sense St John says: 'He who does not believe (in the Son) is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God' (John 3:18).

That so extreme a threat does not deprive man of his freedom of choice, is seen in the first place in the fact of our daily experience, that frequently not even the threats of eternal chastisement can disturb the levity of so many people. That God, notwithstanding his threats, respects man's freedom is shown in the way Christ acted, e.g. in his moving and grief-stricken words about the holy city: 'How often would I have gathered

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[5] That the warning of the grave consequences of refusing to believe does not infringe man's freedom of choice may also be shown by an analogy. If, in a Parliament, all the grave consequences of a decision were to be foreseen, would that be an offence against the freedom of Parliament and its members, or would it not rather be an effective way—often the only effective way—of understanding the situation, so as to take the necessary measures? So it is with this—the threats of 'punishments' are simply grave warnings, which point out the inevitable consequences which would follow man's final refusal to accept in faith God's revelation and all that it means for him.

your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not' (Luke 13:34; cf. Matt. 23:37). In the face of the unbreachable barrier of a creature's deliberate refusal Christ could only weep (cf. Luke 19:41-44), since God, who made man free, wills only an assent and a love that are voluntary and unconstrained.

Faith, both in origin and growth, is a gift from God

This consideration—of the great gravity of man's choice in the face of revelation—is bound to inspire not only serious thought but even fear. The Council did not for a moment think of mitigating its gravity with illusions by saying, for example, that man can achieve his salvation by the power of his own mind and will. On the contrary, the next passage of our document, in explaining man's response to God, who is shown in Christ, aims precisely at making us understand that the obedience of faith is a grace, that is to say a free gift of God: 'If this faith is to be shown, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind, and giving "joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it" ' (no. 5).[6]

(1) Let us establish first of all the fact that believing is a free gift from God. St Paul writes to the Philippians: 'It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake' (Phil 1:29). Further, believing is thus a grace given through Christ. To the Ephesians the apostle writes: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works lest any man should boast' (Eph. 2:8-9; cf. Rom. 3:27-28). The clear assertion in words, no less than the contrast between the gift of faith and the works of man, and finally the purpose of God's acting in this way ('lest any man should boast') show that not only salvation but also the faith by which it is received, are gifts from God. In the discourse in which he promised the great gift of the Eucharist, Jesus clearly and definitely affirmed: 'No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draw him' (John 6:44). Christ repeated that principle again in the same discourse (v. 65). Seeking to explain the Hebrews' refusal to believe the gospel, St Paul asserts: 'So it depends not on man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy' (Rom. 9:16). In the same sense St Paul was to say elsewhere: 'No one can say Jesus is Lord' (thus confessing belief in the divinity of Christ) 'except by the Holy Spirit' (I Cor. 12:3). For this reason Jesus was to say to Peter after the latter had confessed his belief in his divinity: 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 16:17). In similar words Jesus also explained that the good news is understood by the simple, while it remains 'hidden' from those who seem to be wise: 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and hast revealed them to babes' (Matt. 11:25).

(2) For what reasons are we to acknowledge this absolute need of God's free help in order that we may offer faith to God who reveals himself? Let us start with the reasons which come from man himself. St John, pondering on the mystery of man's refusal to believe in the 'light of the world' gives this profound reason for it: 'The light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.' And he goes on to explain: 'For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.' The evangelist then illustrates this from the opposite angle: 'He who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God' (John 3:19-21). There are many sorts of obstacles which man puts in the way of faith, as Jesus showed in the parable of the sower (cf. Matt. 13). There is the 'rocky ground' in which the seed of the word of God cannot strike root because of its shallowness: there are the thorns of the 'cares of the world and the delight

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[6] The Council is here quoting Vatican I, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, chap. 2, *Denz.*, 1791.

in riches' which choke the word of God (cf. Matt. 13:20-22). These obstacles are also pictured in the parable of the great supper, in the excuses which the people who are invited make for not accepting the invitation: one has bought a field and another five yoke of oxen, another has married a wife, etc. (Luke 14:14-20). In other words, they are all too much concerned in different ways with earthly things. Of them Jesus said 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God' (Matt. 19:24; cf. Mark 10:2).

This lengthy enumeration of the various kinds of obstacles which are opposed to the obedience of faith, by evil will or human weakness, must not however obscure the principal reason: faith is God's gift, for it is concerned with the good things of the divine order, which man, even when these good things have been, so to say, 'externally' revealed in Christ, can attain only by faith. For even if man were, *per impossibile*, free of the human frailty caused by original sin, and absolutely without the obstacles of evil works, he still would not be able to believe in the revelation of God in Christ without God's free help.

(3) The texts which we have quoted to show that faith is a free gift of God, also contain some suggestions as to how to cure our own powerlessness to obtain the gift of faith. Let us add another. St Paul recommended 'that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men', and gave as the reason for this that God 'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (I Tim. 2:1, 4). Yet the real cure for this condition is according to the New Testament the humble attitude of the person who realizes his own lack of power and the many obstacles which he has interposed between himself and faith, and who humbly entrusts himself wholly and entirely to God in Christ. This then is the suggestion given to us by the text we have quoted above, that God had 'hidden' the meaning of the good news from the 'wise and understanding' and had revealed it 'to babes' (cf. Matt. 11:25). Therefore Christ warned in general terms: 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 18:3). This was the reason for the special love which Jesus showed for the poor (cf. also *Church*, no. 55), and why he had allowed his own birth to be revealed to poor shepherds, and why these men had believed it even after so simple a revelation (cf. Luke 2:8-20), whereas so many responsible people of the chosen race would not believe him even after all the astonishing miracles which he performed. It was for this reason that Christ made himself the 'friend' of publicans and sinners (cf. Matt. 11:19) because he knew that these men, deeply humbled by the knowledge of their sins, were more disposed to seek his help and to believe.

It may be aded that, according to the doctrine of the New Testament, God himself 'gave men up' to their own lusts, that is, he left them at the mercy of their own weakness and passions, so as to dispel their illusions about their own goodness and strength, to convince them of their weakness and powerlessness, and to persuade them to turn humbly to God and to seek Christ the Saviour. In this sense St Paul says at the end of the meditation about the grave problem of the salvation of the Hebrews and other peoples: 'For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all' (Rom. 11:32). In the same sense one should read the profound saying of St Paul that the law 'was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made' (Gal. 3:19): the law, then, was to show man the deep contradictions of his being and to make him feel them. St Paul writes in the letter to the Romans: 'The law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil is close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members' (Rom. 7:14-23). Such an experience will make a man cry with the apostle: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' and reply with the same apostle: 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord [who has brought me this deliverance]' (*ibid.*, vv. 24-25).

(4) Though the Council leaves us in no illusion about our weakness, even our absolute powerlessness to achieve faith by our own efforts, this does not mean that God leaves us alone or actually denies us the grace of faith. No, it is merely a question of ensuring that we take note of our real position with regard to faith, and understand that it is not by our merit or our own work but by grace that we have been saved, by the gift of God alone (cf. Eph. 2:8). Once this is clear to man and he has taken up the attitude before God which follows therefrom, the Father of lights (cf. James 1:17) certainly does not withhold his gifts. For if he conceived the divine plan of raising man to fellowship of life with himself, it is natural that he should dispense that divine life to men. We must therefore accept in its full sense St Paul's affirmation that God 'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (I Tim. 2:4). This will of God is as genuine as is his love for man. Now 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him' (John 3:16-17). And we can add with St Paul: 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?' (Rom. 8:32).

(5) Our document specifies even more particularly the work of grace in arousing faith. It speaks of the grace of God which 'precedes and assists' and of the 'interior help of the Holy Spirit . . . moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind, and giving joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it' (no. 5). The last words of this passage are taken from Vatican I's *Constitution on the Catholic Faith*,

which in its turn quotes a canon of the second Council of Orange of the sixth century, which was concerned with the semi-Pelagian heresy. This heresy, though admitting a certain necessity of grace, greatly restricted the field of that necessity.[7]

The writings of the New Testament, specially those of St Paul, often speak of the action of God, his grace and his Spirit in men's hearts. St Paul compares this particular action to the emergence of light at the beginning of the creation: 'For it is the God who said "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (II Cor. 4:6). Of the great divine benefits which the human eye does not see and the human ear does not hear St Paul says: 'God has revealed [them] to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God' (I Cor. 2:9-11). That St Paul here is speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men is made abundantly clear, for he continues: 'Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God' (2:12). But this work of grace does not consist of the illumination of the intellect alone, but affects also the decision of the will and the taking of appropriate steps: 'God is at work in you', again says St Paul, 'both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13). In fact, the text we have just quoted is referring to that gentle power with which the Father draws men to his Son: 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him' (John 6:44; cf. 45) said Jesus in the sermon at Capernaum.

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[7] For fuller information here is the text of the document of the First Vatican Council: ' . . . No one, however, can "accept the preaching of the gospel", which is needed to attain salvation, without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all men the faculty of accepting and believing the truth' (*Denz.*, 1791); the text of the pertinent canon of the *Council of Orange* is: 'If anyone maintain that by natural endowment he can rightly think or choose anything which belongs to the certainty of eternal life, or can be saved, that is accept the preaching of the gospel, without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all men the faculty of accepting and believing in the truth, he is deceived by an heretical spirit, not understanding the voice of God which says in the gospel: "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5); and the voice of the apostle: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claiming anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God" (II Cor. 3:5)' (can. VII, *Denz.*, 180).

(6) One last point: faith is not confined to a pure and simple assent to the divine revelation (cf. no. 5); it is gradually perfected by the Holy Spirit so that there is a real advance in the understanding of things revealed by God. 'To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation, the Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts' (no. 5). There is therefore a progress, which is also the fruit of grace and the Holy Spirit. The Council had already emphasized the intellectual aspect of faith ('full submission of the intellect . . . assenting to the truth revealed by him'), and it now does so even more strongly. On this point the Constitution will speak more fully in the following chapter when it expounds the transmission of sacred tradition (no. 8). It seemed fitting however to emphasize it in our general explanation of the nature of faith.

The work of the Holy Spirit in perfecting the believer's understanding of revelation is often stressed in the New Testament, particularly by St John and St Paul. St John asserts in the well known passage of his first letter, that it is the Holy Spirit who teaches the faithful: 'But the annointing which you have received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his annointing teaches you everything and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him' (John 2:27).[8] Very frequently this work of the Spirit is stressed

in St Paul. So he prays for the Ephesians 'that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints . . .' (Eph. 1:17-18). Later in the same letter he asks for God's light, so that the faithful may understand the mystery of Christ, particularly that of his charity: 'For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, and that you may be filled with all the fulness of God' (3:14-19). In the letter to the Colossians he prays 'for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ . . .' (Col. 2:1-2).

The work of the Holy Spirit in perfecting the faith of believers is more fully described also in the *Constitution on the Church*, which explains how all God's people share in the prophetic office of Christ 'by spreading abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity' (*Church*, no. 12). Now concerning the life of faith the Council explains the function and importance of the 'sense of faith', and indeed the infallibility of faith which is proper to the faithful as a whole: 'The body of the faithful as a whole, annointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. John 2:20-27) cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of faith which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when 'from the bishops down to the last member of the laity' it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. For, by this sense of faith which is aroused and maintained by the Spirit of truth, God's people accepts not the word of men but the very Word of God (cf. I Thess. 2 : 13). It clings without fail to the faith once delivered to the saints, understands it with right judgment, and applies it more thoroughly to life' (*ibid.*).

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[8] I John 2:27; cf. v. 20; clearly these words do not mean that the apostle intended to deny the place and function fulfilled in the Church by the hierarchy. It is rather a vivid and paradoxical expression, usual among Easterns, emphasizing the reality and efficacy of the inner *Magisterium* of the Holy Spirit. We can be sure that the words: 'You have no need that anyone should teach you' which refer to Jer. 31, 34, do not exclude the external *Magisterium*, from the very fact that St John himself clearly affirms that *Magisterium*. For the existence and function of the *Magisterium* were as clear as could be after all the apostle had related, in his gospel, the formation and mission of the apostles; cf. also I John 1:1-15 where he asserts that faith rests on the witness and preaching of the apostles.

We have seen in this chapter how the Council has summarized in a very few lines the essential elements of man's response to God who reveals himself; we say 'the essential elements' for clearly it neither intended nor could intend to give a complete treatise on faith as a theological virtue. From what we have said however there is no room for doubt about the nature and decisive importance of faith and its personal, complete and decisive character; for man it is a question of life and death. If then it is true that man by himself is powerless to make this decision, the Constitution gives him general advice as to where and how to obtain God's help to enable him to do so. Finally, faith is shown in its living reality, capable of development, of growth and of ever greater perfection.

6 | Revelation handed on to all generations

Speaking in many and various ways by the prophets and finally by his only Son (cf. Heb. 1 : 1-2) God had entrusted and given to men the incomparable treasure of his word and revelation. This is no ordinary treasure for upon it depend the eternal life or death of men. It contains all that men and all mankind need to know and to do in order to pursue their proper temporal and eternal destiny, which is the restoration, unity and happiness of mankind in Christ. Man consents to share this treasure by the obedience of faith with which he entrusts himself freely and entirely to God. So we are faced with the problem of how and where the revelation of God, which has been given in definite periods of history, is put before men; in other words how this great treasure has been handed on from generation to generation, and in what way its authentic integrity has been preserved. It cannot be a question of indifference to mankind whether these great gifts of God in Christ have been handed down to them true and integral, or whether this essential sustenance of their temporal and eternal existence has come to them incomplete, distorted and corrupt. The question of its preservation seems all the more important in view of the ease with which its purity could have been compromised. In the present state of mankind, particularly in the field of religious knowledge, it is easy for error to creep in (cf. no. 6), and that could occur even more easily in the case of divine revelation, which communicates to men knowledge of 'those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind' (*ibid.*). For this reason alone the transmission of the truths revealed would be exposed to faulty interpretations, etc.

This general outline of the problem is important if we are to understand its exact position in the chapter which we are expounding: it does not deal directly, much less exclusively, with the controversy which arose in the sixteenth century between Catholics and Protestants about the relation of tradition to Scripture. This special problem is naturally included in our chapter, but the scope of the chapter is much broader and more general. It is a question of the totality of the means fore-ordained by Christ so that revelation might be handed on among men from generation to generation in all the purity and integrity of its content.

To deal with this problem, our document states first of all the basic fact that Christ chose the method of the living transmission of revelation through the apostles and their successors. Now in order to follow the command of Christ to teach all nations, the apostles made use not only of oral preaching but also of the written word (no. 7). Our document therefore defines the nature of these two fundamental instruments for the handing down of revelation. First of all it explains tradition, its connection with the people of God and its object, and its development and function with regard to the written word of God itself (no. 8); then the relations between tradition and Scripture are more fully expounded (no. 9), and lastly is considered the relation of the whole deposit of faith, tradition and Scripture, to the people of God and to the tasks of the living *Magisterium* of the Church (no. 10).

What ways were open to Christ for transmitting and preserving revelation?

To understand better the method which Christ ordained for the transmission of revelation it will be useful here to embark on a short psychological-historical reflection, asking ourselves what sort of possibilities there were, and how men have acted throughout history in approaching the problem of handing down spiritual values from generation to generation.

(1) Such a reflection is particularly useful in order to get our comment on this chapter in focus with the mentality of modern man. Modern man, with the progressive re-awakening of the social sense, is at present gradually emerging from the era of an over-emphasized individualism, beginning at the time of the Renaissance and not yet quite superseded.[1] This individualism has, among other things, brought about an inflexible struggle against the very principle of 'tradition' and its function in human life, as well as against particular traditions. So too the repudiation of tradition in the theological sense of the word by the Reformation of the sixteenth century was largely the product of the same individualistic spirit, which lost sight of the social factors in life and with them of the function and importance of environment, institutions, traditions, etc. Thus man was divorced from society, from its history and from tradition, and was imagined as ruling his life by a personal faith, living and existing in isolation before God, reading and interpreting the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who enlightens the individual and directs his life; such a man, however, does not look to the past and to tradition and has no use for a visible Church by means of which the deposit of faith has been handed down to him. But with the general re-awakening of the social sense, with the re-born understanding of the value of 'tradition' and traditions, there has begun an enquiry into the origin and history of ideas; the environment in which they arose and in which they have been transmitted has been examined, and the influences to which they have been subjected have been sought. This modern method, which we may call historical-sociological, rescues doctrines from their isolation and sets them in the main stream of tradition.

All this has had its effect too in the field of religion; hence the so-called 'rediscovery of the Church' on the part of Christians (it was a Protestant writer who said this), and in particular of the principle of tradition as the means of handing on the content of the faith. This process has been largely brought into favour by the method of form criticism, which has revealed without possibility of doubt that before any part of the New

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[1] Cf. Bea, *The Church and Mankind*, Chapman, London, 1967, chap. 1.

Testament was written, Christianity was spread by word of mouth and that the writers of the New Testament themselves drew from this living source. This atmosphere of rediscovery of the Church and of tradition inspires the public declarations now constantly being heard in the Protestant world in favour of a living *Magisterium* which gives the believer an authentic and binding interpretation of the faith.[2]

(2) Returning then to our historical inquiry as to the methods of transmission which men have adopted, it is possible to give, first of all, the general reply that for the handing on of a 'spirit', from the purely human point of view, two main lines of transmission are open: that of live transmission by suitable and properly trained men, who then choose and train others, and that of the written word. Naturally these two methods could be combined and employed together.

Let us look first at live transmission. Considering the problem of the handing on of a 'spirit', it was natural enough to think that the best and most effective method would be to do so by means of men trained by the master, who would in the same way hand on that spirit to others. Our history shows that in most cases it was realized that this method, in order to give a minimum of stability to the transmission, needed the support of a certain number of formulae, which could be handed on either by oral transmission or in writing. This brought with it a new difficulty, that of transforming and, as it were, embodying 'spirit' in formulae—which, because of the way in which they were preserved and transmitted, could not be very numerous.[3]

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[2] Cf. Bea, *The Unity of Christians*, Chapman, London, 1963, pp. 145, 146; cf. also note 19 below.

[3] For a concrete example of this let us take Confucius and Confucianism. The master did not write anything, but entrusted the transmission of his teaching to his school. In fact his teaching consisted of expounding the 'Book of Verses' and the 'Book of Stories'. These books are anthologies chosen by the master himself and on the whole consisting of material handed down by tradition. Therefore the saying 'I hand on, I do not invent' is attributed to Confucius. All the same the master expounded his own teaching in the interpretation of these collections.

We have a similar instance in Islam. In the oldest parts of the *Koran* Mahomet appeals to the witness of the 'people of the book' that is to the Hebrews and

There was the further difficulty of understanding and interpreting such formulae as generation followed generation and mentalities and even language changed. Therefore, in the training of men who would hand on in a living manner the spirit in question, there had to be added also the transmission of a right interpretation of the formulae in which it had been embodied. So little by little the formulae, whether they were transmitted by the oral method or in writing, were immersed in a living flow of interpretations which grew and increased with the passage of time. This flow of living interpretation which accompanied the formulae throughout the centuries was bound to grow in proportion to the importance of the spirit that was to be handed down and the influence of that spirit on the lives of men. However, such an influence could not exist if it were not adaptable. A simply mechanical reiteration of formulae might, with the passage of time, render the original spirit incomprehensible to subsequent generations. Instead it was necessary for the spirit to be more and more deeply understood and also more accurately expressed in the formulae by which it was transmitted, and then explained to new generations in terms appropriate to their mentality.[4]

Christians. It is indeed known that he borrowed as much from the Old Testament as from the New (cf. *Non-Christian Religions*, no. 3). Nonetheless the *Koran* is, according to the Sunnities who make up the large majority of the followers of Islam, integrated and completed by the *Sunna*, the legitimate traditions of the sayings and deeds of Mahomet, and those traditions are complementary to the sacred book. Hence the name Sunnites for the followers of this doctrine as distinct from the Sciites.

Finally, let us add the instance of Judaism in which in the time of Jesus himself the traditional method of teaching in Rabbinic circles was that of the living word, by means of formulae committed to memory; cf. B Gerhardson: *Memory and Manuscript: Oral and written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, Uppsala, 1961.

[4] Referring again to the examples of several schools or systems of religion, we note how in Islam, for example, at the end of the first century of the Hegira (the Muslim era) the *Sunna*, the legitimate traditions, already had an authoritive voice in interpreting the *Koran*. In Judaism too the Old Testament was accompanied by a living stream of interpretation which was only much later set down in writing, e.g. in the *Mishnah* (of the second century A.D.) and in the *Talmud*, both Babylonian and Palestinian (from the third to fifth century A.D.)

Revelation handed on by the apostles and their successors

Let us now, in the light of this consideration, see how Christ acted. In the first place our document establishes that in the beginning Christ chose the method of *live transmission*, that is transmission by means of suitably trained men. This we learn from a first reading of the gospels—in what Christ did during his life and what he told his apostles to do before his ascension, and also from the way in which the apostles put his command into practice.

(1) *First let us see how Jesus acted.* To explain this the Constitution starts from what was implictly contained in the preceding chapter: 'In his gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what he had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations' (no. 7), and continues: 'Therefore Christ the Lord, in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (cf. II Cor. 1:20; 3:16; 4:6), commissioned the apostles to preach to all men that gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and thus to impart to them divine gifts' (*ibid.*).

We need not stress the various elements of this text which are for the most part taken from the preceding chapter and easily recognizable. Nor need we stress the rest of the text. The Council assumes what was abundantly described in the gospel—that Jesus chose and patiently trained the twelve, which assumption has in its turn been summarized in the *Constitution on the Church* (cf. no 19). Next our document returns, both for the summary of the content of the gospel and for a description of the command of Jesus, to the two chief, pertinent texts in the New Testament. First of all it quotes Matt. 28:19-20: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.' The words of the Constitution about the gospel being 'the source of all *saving* truth' clearly derive from St Mark: 'He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:16).

We may add as a further explanation that the method of oral transmission is a part of the divine teaching method practised from the days of the Old Testament and continued in the New. St Paul shows this in the letter to the Romans, referring not so much to a single text in Isaiah, as to the constant and usual practice of the Old Testament prophets: 'But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?... So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ' (Rom. 10: 14, 15 and 17). St Paul confirms this thought with the saying of the prophet, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!' (Rom. 10:15; cf. Is. 52:7).

(2) *Let us now consider how the apostles carried out the command of Jesus.* On this point the Council says: 'The commission was faithfully fulfilled by the apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example and by ordinance, handed on what they received from the lips of Christ, from living with him, and from what he did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing' (no. 7). This text establishes that the apostles carried out the command of Christ by their living testimony, and it also introduces a new element: that the oral transmission was completed by the written word. For the passage mentions two ways in which the command of Christ was 'faithfully fulfilled': on the one hand the apostles passed on the revelation 'by their oral preaching, by example and by ordinances', and on the other some of the apostles and their fellows 'committed the message of salvation to writing'.

(a) As regards the first method of transmission, the living testimony, it is necessary first of all to take a note of the variety of methods used: it is not a question, as one might think and as indeed has often been thought, of preaching only, but also of examples and institutions ('ordinances' in document); all these served to hand on to mankind what Christ had brought to it. Maybe this variety of means reflect the variety of those means of which God himself made use in order to show himself to men, as we have seen in the second chapter, for he did not use words alone but also 'events'—deeds wrought in the history of salvation' (no. 2). Christ also himself accomplished his revelation not by words alone but by the very fact of his presence, and by his whole life (cf. no. 4). We shall see later the important bearing that this vast conception of the methods used for the handing on of revelation has on our way of understanding the tradition of the Church.

The oral transmission of revelation by the apostles is further revealed by indicating the sources from which they derived what they handed on. In the first place, there was obviously what they received from Christ himself, that is from his public preaching and from the special teaching which he gave them privately.[5] In addition they learned from his life itself.[6] Further, the apostles were taught by the 'works of Christ' which in their own way revealed the real meaning of his words (cf. no. 2 and chapter 3 above). This is why the apostles themselves, in handling the revelation of Christ, also made use of the works, or rather the 'examples'. Finally one must remember a most important and decisive factor, the prompting of Holy Spirit. For Jesus had said to the apostles in the discourse after the Last Supper: 'I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth' (John 16:12-13), and again: 'The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you' (John 14:26).[7] In these 'promptings' also we are always concerned with the revelation of *Christ*. The Spirit will 'bring to remembrance' what Christ had said to the apostles. In this sense it is Christ who gives assurance: the Spirit 'will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said he will take what is mine and declare it to you' (John 16:13-15).

This is not the time to cite examples and proofs of this action of the Holy Spirit in the lives and preaching of the apostles. Note that we have said 'in the lives . . . of the apostles'. For just as the enumeration of examples and institutions is among the means used for the handing down of the proclamation of salvation so also the 'promptings' of the Holy Spirit are concerned not only with preaching but also with practical life, administration, etc. The narratives in the Acts of the Apostles and in the apostles' letters are a continual living illustration of this.

(b) We now come to the written method of handing on the proclamation of salvation. From the context it is clear that the Council's object here is to affirm the fact that this proclamation was handed on both by the apostles and by their close collaborators. In addition it states that the authors of these writings put them together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The fact that revelation was handed on in writing is amply proved from the documents of the New Testament. Here it is rather a question of showing that these writings too were a means of obeying the command of Christ to proclaim his revelation to men. This is particularly clear in the case of St Paul, the tireless preacher *par excellence,* whose letters are intended above all to keep in touch with the communities which he had founded and to remind them of the teaching which he had previously given them by word of mouth. Indeed, the apostle frequently refers them to his oral teaching (cf. e.g. I Thess. 4:11; II Thess. 2:3; Gal. 5:21; I Cor. 11:23; 15:1-3), here and there he develops on something he had already said (cf. e.g. I Cor. 7:1-35).

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[5] On this last point cf. for example Matt. 13:18-23, wherein Christ explains to the apostles privately the meaning of the parable told to the people; the discourse after the Last Supper in John 13-17; etc.

[6] The Latin *conversatio* is translated in various ways as e.g. 'association' or 'living in company with', etc. But *conversatio* even in classical Latin has not only the meaning 'relations with other people', but also means 'kind of life' (cf. Georges-Calonghi). It is a meaning often used in the New Testament: cf. Phil. 3:20; Gal. 1:13; Eph. 4:22; I Peter 2:12; 3:16; James 3:13, etc. This meaning corresponds better with our passage which thus interpreted clearly refers to the words, life and works of Christ. This turn of phrase corresponds in its turn to the thought expressed in no. 4 of the Constitution, that Christ is revealed 'making himself present and manifesting himself'.

[7] John 14:26.

Next let us look at those cases where the authors of these writings are not apostles but 'apostolic men', that is, men who were in close contact with the apostles, for example the evangelists, St Mark and St Luke. The expression 'apostolic men' indicates the very close connection between their writings and the preaching of the apostles. A characteristic instance of this connection is the case of St Luke who, in the introduction to his gospel, states explicitly that both he and others 'have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us' and have done so 'just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were *eyewitnesses and ministers of the word*' (Luke 1-2); undoubtedly in these last words he is referring to the apostles. In other words, he sets out to record in writing the preaching of the apostles (cf. Acts 6:4). That is true also of writings such as the Acts of the Apostles. Indeed this book, in addition to recording summaries of several discourses by St Peter and St Paul, gives a vivid picture of the way in which the apostles obyed Christ's command to proclaim the gospel of salvation in 'oral preaching, by example and by ordinances'.

Of the exact meaning of the expression 'by inspiration of the Holy Spirit' we shall speak when we comment on the next chapter of the Constitution which deals with this very subject. What the document wishes to establish now is that these writings are 'Scriptures', whose author is God in the sense in which St Paul writes: 'All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness' (II Tim. 3:16). Similarly St Peter after having declared that 'no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation', adduces this reason for it, 'because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God' (II Pet. 1:20-21). Note in the texts quoted the equivalence of the terms 'Holy Scripture' and 'inspired by God' (or 'moved by the Holy Spirit'). Hence it is clear that St Peter, when he speaks of the epistles of St Paul and compares them with the 'other Scriptures' (II Pet. 3:16), is telling us that St Paul's letters were composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. However we have in Scripture no general guarantee that the writings of which our document speaks were composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So the document will explain later (no. 8) that it is in fact 'through tradition that the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known', that through it we may know which writings, composed by the apostles and apostolic men, are to be held as written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, we may ask: How did the apostles arrive at their decision to make use of the method of the written word as well as of that of preaching? This decision was certainly not influenced by the fact that the sacred books of the Old Testament already existed and that Christ, and after him the apostles, included these books in their preaching (cf. no 16). They were in fact concerned with God's word, which Christ said he had not come to abolish but to fulfil: 'not an iota . . . will pass . . . till all is accomplished' (cf. Matt. 5:17-18). So, just as Christ in his own life, until its consummation on the Cross, was concerned that the Scriptures should be fulfilled (cf. Matt. 26:54; Mark 14:49; John 19:28), so also the apostles from the very first preaching on the day of Pentecost took care to confirm the mission, life and work of Christ with references to the Old Testament (cf. chapter 5 above). Since therefore the apostles knew that in the Old Testament, by the prophets, through whom God had spoken, the word of God had been announced chiefly by preaching, but that later the written word had been added to this, so they also took the same course. Thus two methods of transmission came into being, tradition and Holy Scripture.

(3) One last point: the apostles in their turn entrusted the gospel to their successors, the Bishops. As this point is fully developed in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, (cf. nos. 19 and 20), our document touches but lightly upon it. 'In order to keep the gospel for ever whole and alive within the Church, the apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over their own teaching role" to them' (no. 7).

We restrict ourselves, however, chiefly for the convenience of the reader, to quoting one essential text of the *Constitution on the Church* which relates to our subject. It starts from the following thought: 'That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20), since the gospel which was to be handed down by them is for all time the source of all life for the Church' (no. 20). From this follows the consequence that the apostles 'in order that the mission assigned to them might continue after their deaths . . . passed on to their immediate co-operators, as a kind of testament, the duty of perfecting and consolidating the work begun by themselves (cf. Acts 20:25-27; II Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:5), charging them to attend to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit placed them to shepherd the Church of God (cf. Acts 20:28). They therefore appointed such men, and authorized the arrangement that, when these men should have died, other approved men would take up their ministry' (*ibid.*). For this doctrine the Constitution appeals to the witness of the New Testament. In addition to the passage from the Acts already quoted, we may note that St Paul writes to his two favoured disciples, Timothy and Titus: 'What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also' (II Tim. 2:2); 'This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you' (Tit. 1:5). This evidence is in its turn consolidated by that of the most ancient fathers of the Church, among whom the Constitution specifies Pope Clement, St Ignatius the matryr, St Irenaeus and Tertullian, whose testimony would be too long to quote.

Who are the principal 'successors' of the apostles to whom

these passages refer? The *Constitution on the Church* answers: 'Among these various ministries which, as tradition witnesses, were exercised in the Church from the earliest times, the chief place belongs to the office of those who, appointed to the episcopate in sequence running back to the beginning, are the ones who pass on the apostolic seed. Thus, as St Irenaeus testifies, through those who were appointed bishops by the apostles, and through their successors down to our own time, the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved . . .' (no. 20). These statements are supported in the same conciliar document by the testimonies of the fathers of the Church.

We do indeed know the difficulty that our non-Catholic brethren of the Reformation have with regard to this point, and we do not imagine that we can dispose of it in these few lines. Like Catholics, they also seek to understand those studies which are concerned with the Church, and particularly the commentaries on the relevant passages in the Council's *Constitution on the Church*. Nonetheless we may add that some of their material difficulties, not so much about the hierarchical structure of the Church in general, as about the particular nature and limits of tradition, will gradually be cleared up by our further comments on this chapter of the Constitution.

Our document ends its explanation of the crucial facts about the handing on of divine revelation with these profound words: 'This sacred tradition, therefore, and sacred Scripture of both the Old and the New Testament are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see him as he is, face to face (cf. I John 3:2)' (no. 7). In this text, as in St Paul, the Church has been thought of as on 'pilgramage', in so far as here it has no lasting city but seeks one to come (cf. Heb. 13:14). In this respect we must quote the words of St Paul: 'We know', he says, 'that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight' (II Cor. 5:5-7). And since we walk 'not by sight', we do not see things directly 'face to face' but 'in a mirror dimly' (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). This 'mirror' is none other than the revelation of God put before us in tradition and in Holy Scripture.[8] In this the pilgrim Church 'looks at God, from whom she has received everything' and towards whom she makes her way, 'until she is brought finally to see him as he is, face to face'.

This statement of the twofold method by which Revelation is brought before us, while summarizing the results of what the document has so far expounded and explained, at the same time hints at the problems which still remain to be solved. These concern the various elements of tradition and its relationship with Holy Scripture.

Sacred tradition safeguards truth

The Constitution now turns to the task of specifying the various elements contained in the principal facts explained above, concerning the handing down of the gospel—thus proceeding from more obvious matters to those which are more difficult (no. 8). First it states that the purpose of tradition is to safeguard apostolic preaching, and then it points out the significance of this. Since indeed the idea of 'safeguarding' can easily be misunderstood in the sense of a mechanical preservation and transmission as of a dead thing, the document affirms that preservation and faithful transmission do not exclude, but rather require, an increasingly profound understanding of the apostolic preaching. Indeed, as it explains, tradition is 'life-giving', because it ensures that in the Church there shall always be present the living word of God by means of which he speaks to the Bride of his only-begotten Son.[9]

Above all, as a conclusion drawn from all that the document has so far said, it is stated that tradition is designed to safeguard the apostolic preaching in the Church: 'So the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by a continuous succession of preachers until the end of time' (no. 8). In this first statement, which does no more than introduce the subject which follows, the particular emphasis is on the fact that the preaching of the apostles 'is expressed in a special way in the inspired books'. In these words it asserts on the one hand that in Holy Scripture this preaching is expressed in a special way, that is—as we have seen above in no. 7—in words which are clearly the words of God, since God is the 'literary' author of these writings, and at the same time it affirms the essential connection of these books with the apostolic preaching. They are not a completely new thing, different from or extraneous to apostolic preaching; they contain nothing but that preaching, although in a special form, that is as the inspired word of God.

Let us now see in what sense the apostolic preaching is preserved by means of tradition. The Constitution's answer is at first sight surprising in that it seems to take the form of moral exhortation addressed to the faithful rather than of a dogmatic statement. It says in fact: 'Therefore the apostles (since the preaching had to be preserved till the end of time) handing on what they themselves had received; warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (cf. II Thess. 2:15) and to fight in defence of the faith handed on once and for all (cf. Jude 3)' (*ibid.*). The surprising way in which the Constitution here expresses itself is due to its intention, while still maintaining what it has just said about the role of the apostles' successors in that preservation, to emphasize the fact that the safeguarding of the apostolic preaching is also the task of the whole Church, of the learning as well as of the teaching Church. Let us see in what sense this is affirmed.

(1) First: what does 'preserving' the apostolic preaching

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[8] The reader will have noticed that in this passage all Holy Scripture, including the Old Testament, has been mentioned. The way in which the Old Testament plays a part in the transmission of the revelation of Christ through the apostles and their successors will be explained in the commentary on chapter 4 (no. 16) of the Constitution.

[9] The commentary of Schutz-Thurian (pp. 95-96) rightly notes that in this chapter the term 'tradition' gradually takes on several meanings, or rather points out several aspects of a complex reality which must be distinguished in each case. In this connection it is interesting and instructive to note the parallel which it draws between the Constitution and the Report of the Third Conference on Faith and Order held at Montreal in 1963 (pp. 98-103).

mean? The answer is to be found in the assertion of the Constitution that the apostles handed on what they themselves had received. These words take up the almost identical expressions which are repeatedly used in the New Testament and which indicate the exact function of those who are to hand on the revelation. The complete New Testament concept of 'handing down' contains these elements: a doctrine is received, and with it the duty of preserving it and faithfully handing it on (cf. II Thess. 2:15; I Cor. 11:2, 23; 15:1-3; II Thess. 3:6; Rom. 6:17; Gal. 1:9, 12; Phil. 4:9; Col. 2:6 and 8). Let us remember on this subject the well-known formulae of St Paul: 'For I have received from the Lord what I also delivered to you' (I Cor. 11:23); 'I delivered to you . . . what I also received' (I Cor. 15:3). Furthermore he is always warning his hearers to preserve the doctrine as it was handed on (cf. II Thess. 2:14; I Cor. 15:2; I Cor. 11:2). St Paul also uses the very strong expression: 'But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed' (Gal. 1:8-9).

Speaking of his own preaching, St Paul said that he had been brought 'by revelation', that is as a consequence of a divine revelation, to Jerusalem and he continued: 'I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain' (Gal. 2:2-3). He is referring here to the Council of Jerusalem, an event of great significance for our subject. It was concerned with the controversy which arose out of St Paul's preaching to converted Gentiles, when he taught them that they were not bound to observe the so-called ritual law of the Old Testament. Various Jewish Christian communities had become alarmed at this element in Paul's teaching; this shows how jealousy the communities kept watch on each other with a view to the faithful transmission of the message of the gospel. The controversy between St Paul and the Judaizers was brought before the elders, but settled mainly by the apostles

themselves. The deep significance of this recourse to the apostles and of their intervention lies in the fact that both those who brought the charge of infidelity and those who defended themselves, had in common the true concept of 'tradition', that is the deep conviction that it was essential faithfully to preserve the doctrine they had received and to hand it on unimpaired, and that the apostles must safeguard this.

This New Testament idea of tradition is fundamental, and it is most important to have an accurate knowledge of its content so as to avoid the danger of thinking of the Christian religion as resembling a school of philosophy or science, which may also have its own special traditions. Christianity is instead a religion which is based on the revelation of God himself, who aims to make men sharers in 'those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind' (no. 6). Thus, and because of the difficulty of the subject, it is very easy for man to err, to add something of his own, and to corrupt what he has received. Therefore the Constitution stresses that his first duty is to receive with humility and then to hand on faithfully what he has received.

(2) The second thought to be emphasized is that already mentioned: the preservation of apostolic preaching is the task of the whole Church, the successors of the apostles and of the faithful (laity) too. It is these last who must—as the Council insists in the words of the apostle—hold fast to the traditions which they have been taught whether by speech or in writing, and who must fight for the faith which has been handed down to them once and for always. This is a very important thought and very timely nowadays. Things have too often been presented in a theoretical and abstract manner, as though there were on the one side the teaching Church, that is the successors of the apostles with their fellow-workers the priests, and on the other the learning Church, that is the Christian laity. The former were to teach, the latter to listen, to learn and to accept by faith the doctrines of the teaching Church. This is an unreal and inaccurate way of thinking. We must not, for example, forget that

priests, while being 'co-operators with the episcopal order' and 'constituting one priesthood with their bishop' and therefore 'consecrated to preach the gospel' (*Church,* no. 28; cf. *Priesthood,* nos. 4 and 7), must also to a great extent be the learning Church *vis à vis* their own bishops (cf. *Priesthood,* no. 7; *Church,* no. 28) and *a fortiori* before the successor of Peter. So Jesus told Peter to strengthen his brethren, the apostles (cf. Luke 22:32), and this naturally applies also to the successor of Peter with regard to the successors of the apostles. Conversely, those who are in one sense the learning Church, must in the other sense be also the teaching Church.

Here is an example of this. The Council reminded parents that in the family 'which is, so to speak, the domestic Church' they are 'the first preachers of the faith to their children' (*Church,* no. 11). Moreover in the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity,* the Council stated that in 'the ministry of the Word and sacraments, which is entrusted in a special way to the clergy', the laity too 'have their very important roles to play if they are to be fellow-workers for the truth (3 John 8)'. The same document adds: 'There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of making the gospel known and men holy'; and explains: 'The true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to the faith, or to believers with a view to instructing and strengthening them, and encouraging them to a more fervent life; "for the love of Christ controls us" (II Cor. 15:14), and the words of the apostle should echo in every Christian heart: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16)' (*Laity,* no. 6). Lastly let us remember the fact that future successors of the apostles are born into a family and receive their earliest education there and at school, so that they are largely moulded by the mentality of their own age, environment, etc. It is therefore of decisive importance for the safe preservation of apostolic preaching in the Church that all these circumstances shall be a good and fruitful soil from which may spring worthy successors of the apostles. In this sense it is true to say that the faithful receive the pastors they deserve, and it may be added, such as they themselves help to form.

Let us add that, as the handing on of the proclamation of salvation by the successors of the apostles has come about under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so also the people of God, in fulfilling its task of preserving the apostolic preaching, is sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Constitituion does not speak of this but nonetheless it is useful to remember this consequence of the general doctrines of the Christian life. If indeed the redeemed are directed and guided in all their lives by the Spirit of sonship which they have received, this is much more the case in the fulfilment of so essential a function as the preservation of revelation. On this matter let it suffice to quote the doctrine of the conciliar *Constitution on the Church,* which explains the importance of the 'sense of faith'—*sensus fidei.* After having explained how the faithful share in the prophetic office of Christ, the Council says: 'The Body of the faithful as a whole, annointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. John 2:20, 27), cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of the faith which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when "from the bishops down to the last member of the laity", it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. For, by this sense of faith which is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, God's people accepts not the word of men but the very word of God (cf. I Thess. 2:13). It clings without fail to the faith once delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3), penetrates it more deeply by accurate insights, and applies it more thoroughly to life' (*Church,* no. 12).

(3) The same lively and concrete concept of tradition as an integral part of the life of the Church appears in the section in which the Council describes the object of that tradition. The document, speaking of the handing down of the proclamation of salvation through the apostles, had already made the point that it was handed down not only by preaching but also by

examples and institutions (cf. no. 7). So now, consistently, it says: 'What was handed down by the apostles'[10] was not only doctrine in the abstract but 'includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life and the increase in faith of the people of God' (no. 8). We are reminded that the revelation of God has the ultimate aim of ensuring that men incorporated in the people of God, may become sons of God and may live as such. Thus it is clear that revelation includes everything necessary for that purpose. Consequently, the tradition which hands on the revelation, hands on everything which is necessary for the sanctification of the people of God.

This full and complete idea of tradition leads the document to conclude: 'The Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is and all that she believes' (no. 8). This is truly an idea, as adequate as is humanly possible, which will have profound consequences for the Council's further elucidation of the theme of tradition. As in the natural field human life, with all that it means, is continually handed down to new generations, so in the supernatural field the Church transmits the divine life in all the fulness of its meaning to new generations. In this way, the people of God grows with the communication and propagation of the divine life among men. As on the night of the paschal vigil, the candles of all those taking part in the congregation, are lighted one after another from the paschal candle, the symbol of the resurrection, so in the darkness of this world the light of the revelation of the risen Christ present in the Church, is always, by means of tradition, kindling anew the lights of those who were 'dark and have become light in the Lord' (cf. Eph. 5:8). In this living way the Church perpetuates and hands on

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[10] Note that the official reporter for this part of the Constitution pointed out in the Council, with regard to the passage just explained, that the words 'which was handed down by the apostles', were chosen to show that the sacred tradition of which the text speaks does not include any kind of tradition (including those that are purely ecclesiastical) but only the so-called divine-apostolic tradition. So our passage refers only to what the apostles received and handed on as the gospel of salvation, and not to the various ecclesiastical traditions which can and often do change.

from generation to generation her own faith, grace and charity, 'everything that she is'.

The continual development of tradition

This title seems paradoxical. How can there be a development when the particular concern is to preserve and hand on faithfully what has been received. Yet the document clearly states: 'This tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit.' This statement is simply a natural consequence of what we have just said, that is, that tradition is identified with the life of the Church with all 'that she herself is and believes'. There must therefore be, as in all life, development and progress. However, in this paragraph the Council was not so much concerned with proving the fact of progress as with explaining its direction. So the document goes on: 'There is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. Luke 12:19, 51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth' (no. 8). The text then indicates what the development of tradition means and what factors promote it.

(1) The development of tradition consists of an ever growing understanding of its object, in its entirety. Thus our document, returning to the way in which it had already explained the means which God and Christ used for revealing themselves, the 'deeds and words' (no. 2), or 'words and deeds' of Christ (no. 4), says that development is concerned as much with 'realities' as with 'the words which have been handed down', putting 'realities' (examples, institutions) rightly in the first place.

(2) What are the factors promoting development? Here also there is much significance in the order in which these factors are listed. The preaching of the successors of the apostles does

not hold pride of place, as might have been expected in accordance with a certain abstract idea of tradition. It is instead assigned the last place, certainly not in order to disparage it, but to emphasize again the thought expounded in the preceding paragraph, that it is the duty of the whole people of God, to develop as well as to preserve tradition—each member naturally in accordance with his own position and office. And it is these factors which are given pre-eminence: 'the contemplation and study made by believers' (no. 8). As the gospel says about the Mother of believers that she 'kept and pondered in her heart' (Luke 2:19, 51) the events in the life of Jesus, so the Constitution says of believers that they ponder in their hearts those things which they have received from the tradition.

Naturally this 'contemplation and study' is in its turn stimulated by the preaching of the successors of the apostles. This is not surprising, but the other source of stimulus suggested in the document may cause surprise: it is 'the intimate understanding of the spiritual realities that they experience'. A brief consideration will bring to mind the great influence exerted by this factor on the development of tradition, or rather on the growth in understanding of the things revealed. Think for example of the tiny seed sown by Christ (Matt. 19:12) and then by St Paul (I Cor. 7:25-38) on the question of virginity. How much the understanding of those few words has grown, together with their importance in the life of the Church, since the establishment in the Church of the order of virgins consecrated to God, and then, little by little, of the innumerable religious congregations of women without which the life and action of the Church today would be unthinkable. Think also how greatly the understanding of evangelical poverty was advanced by the actions and rules of the *Poverello* of Assisi. Speaking even more generally, think how greatly the understanding of the 'evangelical counsels' has been advanced by the gradual development of the religious orders in the Church. Many other examples could be added.

(3) Tradition is then continually being developed. That is a

consequence of the fact that the Church and its life are subject to the law of progressive development, as is shown by the gospel parable of the grain of mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32) and the doctrine of St Paul on the growth and building up of the Mystical Body of Christ (cf. Ephes. 2:21-22; 4:15; Col. 2:19).

And what is the aim of this development? The Church 'constantly moves forward toward the fulness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her' (no. 8). The aim here indicated, to wit the 'fulness of divine truth' shows that development is not in fact contary to the necessity, asserted above, of faithfully preserving the apostolic preaching. Exactly in so far as the development of tradition moves towards the full understanding of revelation, so far does it ensure its perfect preservation. Apostolic preaching is in fact more completely preserved when its profound truth is best understood.

(4) The guarantee of truly authentic progress towards the fulness of truth and therefore also of its preservation is that decisive factor which the Constitution places first, when it says that tradition 'develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit'. This Spirit gives life to the whole existence of redeemed man and of the Church, as we have seen in chapters 2 and 4, and so leads individuals, and in a special way the successors of the apostles, to all truth (cf. John 15:13). Growing understanding and progress towards the fulness of truth are in their turn instrumental in stimulating the life of the Church, and are at the same time an indispensable part of that life. It is in this way that 'the words of God are brought to fulfilment' in the Church.

Tradition enables us to understand the Scriptures more deeply and makes them effective

It may seem that with the explanations of the various aspects of tradition already supplied by the Constitution everything possible has been said on the subject. Yet we still have to explain tradition's function with regard to the written word of God. So the document, by way of illustrating this function, having briefly summed up the results of the last paragraph, begins by affirming in a general way 'the living presence' of tradition in the Church: 'The words of the holy fathers witness to the living presence of this tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice of the believing and praying Church' (no. 8). From the context it is clear that these words refer to the riches which gradually accrue to the Church as she advances in many ways in the understanding of the concepts and words handed down. To make a true estimate of the way in which this advance enriches the life of the Church in her faith and in her prayer, it is enough to think, for example, of the place which is occupied and the influence exerted, specially in the holy Liturgy, in spiritual and ascetic life and in pastoral action, by the writings of the holy fathers, the authoritative teaching of the Church, theological studies, etc.

The affirmation of the living presence of tradition in the Church is the Constitution's preface to its exposition of a special problem, the function of that tradition with regard to the written word of God. On this question the document states: 'Through the same tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made effective in her' (no. 8). Tradition therefore reveals to the Church Scripture as a whole and its individual books, and further enables her to understand their content and put it into practice.

(1) The first contribution of tradition is that it makes known to us 'the full canon of the sacred books'. It is true that a book should bear witness to its own inspiration, i.e. that God is its 'literary' author. But what value would such a witness have, if we did not first assume what we set out to prove, i.e. that it has God for its author? Such witness would be purely human. The fact that the Bible has been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is an entirely supernatural fact and as such can be known only by a revelation from God himself. Therefore, in order to be certain that a writing is inspired by God we need the testimony of an authorized witness of the divine revelation, that is, of one who has been given the task of handing down the revelation; in fact we need tradition.

There is also the problem of recognizing the 'full canon', that is, the complete list of books which were inspired by the Spirit and therefore comprise what we call the 'Holy Scripture' of the Old and New Testaments. It is true that St Peter speaks of the letters of St Paul as 'Scripture' comparing them to other 'scriptures' (II Peter 3:1-16), but he does not mention the names of those letters. The list of the inspired books is known to us only from tradition and was explicitly confirmed by the Councils.[11] In other words, tradition guarantees to us two facts important for the life of the Church; the fact that there exists in the Church a written word of God, a 'Scripture', and the precise list of the inspired books.

(2) There is furthermore the verdict of tradition on the content of Holy Scripture and on its influence on believers. The Constitution says in the words quoted above that tradition causes the sacred letters themselves to be more profoundly understood and unceasingly made effective (no. 8), thus pointing out two functions of tradition with regard to Scripture which are to be distinguished from each other.

Note that in the first place, the document does not say that the sacred writings are understood *only* in the light of tradition, but that they are more profoundly understood in that light. It is not desired, nor is it possible, to deny that a certain understanding of the sacred books may be achieved without, at least, the direct help of tradition.[12] The document is concerned instead with a deeper and more precise understanding of them.

[11] That of Laodicea in A.D. 360; the Provincial Council of Hippo, 393; on the whole question of the canon of Scripture see the author's *De Inspiratione*, pp. 129-136.

[12] We say 'without, at least, the direct' help, because indirect help is almost inevitable. No interpreter can fail to be to some extent influenced, perhaps not always consciously, by this or that part of tradition, even if he is unwilling to admit it. All the commentaries, for example, are full of it; its influence is seen—even while they are trying hard to oppose it—in the authors of dictionaries, encyclopedias, books of biblical theology and of the history of dogma. Thus the indirect and less conscious influence of the documents of tradition is unavoidable.

Today, as we have seen above, scholars pay more and more attention to the importance of seeing how all documents were actually interpreted at the time of their writing. This is also being increasingly recognized in the case of the Bible. Indeed, in this case the influence of this living interpretation is that here we are not concerned with documents which are of interest to men merely for aesthetic or literary reasons and perhaps only to specialist groups, but which are held by very many men to be of central and vital importance for their very existence. Because of this the study and meditation on the Bible are incomparably more intense—indeed impassioned—and in consequence richer and more fruitful. For reasons such as these the written word of God has, almost from the beginning been immersed, in an ever-growing flood of interpretation. That flood is only a part of those treasures which result from the development of tradition and which are transfused into the life and practice of the believing and praying Church. At the same time these treasures in their turn throw light on the word of God. It is therefore in this sense that tradition makes us understand Scripture more profoundly.[13]

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[13] For a more precise understanding of the passage of which we are speaking, note three things:

(1) The Constitution does not explicitly say that tradition is necessary for the deeper understanding of Scripture, but describes what it considers its permanent and essential contribution. This affirmation also implicitly contains that of the necessity of tradition for this purpose. This is clearly deduced from the fact that tradition was stated to be equally necessary for the knowledge of the whole canon of the sacred books. Now the necessity of tradition in regard to this last point is beyond doubt. No. 12 will speak of the necessity of paying heed to tradition in the interpretation of Scripture.

(2) All the factors which contribute to the progress of tradition, as we have seen above, naturally work together to bring about a deeper inderstanding of the written word of God; they include reflection, meditation, study, etc. A special and decisive function, however, remains to the successors of the apostles, for it is based on the fulfilment of Christ's command to teach all nations everything they need to believe. We shall speak of this function more explicitly when we explain the function of the successors of the apostles themselves in making the sacred writings effective.

(3) From what we have said in no. 2 it is clear that the Constitution here implicitly anticipates the theme of the living *Magisterium* of the Church as authentic interpreter of the word of God—a subject which is treated explicitly in no. 10.

(3) Furthermore tradition causes the Bible to be unceasingly effective in various ways. First of all: 1. Holy Scripture needs to be explained, so that the written word may not only be understood in itself, as we have just been saying, but also as a call from God to man in the actual conditions of life, mentality, circumstances, etc. Sometimes we call this kind of explanation the 'application' of doctrine to men's lives; 2. If such an explanation and application are necessary, there is no doubt that they are rightly effected by tradition, that is, in a practical manner by those who have the task of preaching the gospel.

(a) What then is the necessity for such an application and explanation First, the books of Scripture were written at a certain time and in certain circumstances and for men of a certain culture and mentality. All these circumstances are reflected not only in their language and the ideas and illustrations which they use, but particularly in the way they state problems and their solutions. Anyone who has even a little experience in the interpretation of Scripture knows the difficulty of this task and what careful study it necessitates. To this is added the difficulty of the subject matter; we are in fact concerned with God's revelation of realities which transcend the senses, or rather which 'totally transcend the understanding of the human mind' (no. 6). Finally we have to explain this word of God in a way which corresponds to men's mentality and apply it to their actual lives and changing circumstances, so that a man may see its importance for his own life and may understand the word of God as a message addressed to him personally.[14]

How great is the difficulty of this application and what careful explanation is needed may be deduced from the way in which the Council's *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* speaks of the necessary adaptation of preaching, or rather of the method of proclaiming salvation to men of different periods so that they may understand it. On this the Council says: 'From the beginning of her history [the Church] has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various peoples, and has also tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers. Her purpose has been to adapt the gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, in so far as such was appropriate' (*Modern World*, no. 44). This refers to that adaptation of which the same document, inspired by Pope John XXIII's famous inaugural address to the Council, was speaking when it said that theologians must 'seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times; for the deposit of faith, or revealed truths are one thing, but the manner in which it is formulated without violence to its meaning and significance is another' (*Modern World*, no. 62). From this historical consideration the Council deduces this general law: 'This accommodated preaching of the revealed word ought to remain the law of all evangelization' (no. 44). From this, according to the same document, follow important practical consequences: 'It is the task of the entire people of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age and to judge them in the light of the divine word. In this way revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage' (*ibid.*).

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[14] The official commentary which accompanied the third edition of the Constitution (1964) stated that with the help of Scripture, interpreted in the light of tradition, a permanent colloquy between God and the Church is established.

(b) Now, if such a work of explanation and application of the written word of God is necesary so as to make it effective, it is not difficult to see that this task is rightly the responsibility of tradition, or rather actually of the successors of the apostles, whose business it is to hand down the gospel from generation to generation. Why is this? The reply is contained in the basic fact from which the chapter on which we are commenting started, that is the command which Christ gave to his apostles and which they have handed down to their own successors, the bishops. Christ did not command the apostles mechanically to transmit a body of doctrine, but said: 'Go and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matt. 28: 19-20). In consequence our Constitution says that the apostles have in their turn entrusted to their successors 'their own teaching role' (no. 7). It is not then a question of mere material transmission of the revelation, but of explaining it to men in an authoritative and authentic way, in accordance with their culture and mentality, and differences of place and time. The same conclusion is also deduced from the fact that the Church must preserve the evangelical message whole and undefiled, a necessity which is here urged with special references to the difficulty of the subject matter. Now it is only the apostles and their successors who have been promised the special assistance of the Holy Spirit for this purpose, 'a sure gift of truth' (no. 8), by which they are enabled to offer a true explanation of the revelation which will not alter its meaning. All these reasons are also valid for the explanation of the written word of God. If by its very nature it needs to be explained and rendered effective, as we have seen above, and if in addition it is closely connected with the apostolic preaching 'which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books' (no. 8), then it follows that the task of interpreting it and making it operative belongs to the college of bishops which, throughout the ages, is concerned with the passing on—'tradition'—of the legacy of the apostles.

God continues to speak with Bride of his Son

The Constitution ends its explanation of the function exercised by tradition with regard to the written word of God with a synthesis which although very beautiful is nonetheless difficult (no. 8). In it we need to notice and emphasize what is said indirectly quite as much as what is said directly. Here is the relative passage: 'Thus God who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of his beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the gospel resounds in the Church, and through her in the world, leads believers into all truth and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (cf. Col. 3:16)' (no. 8).

Let us look at the structure of the passage and point out its component parts and their connection. First we notice its two principal thoughts: (1) God continues to talk with the Bride of his beloved Son; (2) the Holy Spirit leads believers into all truth and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them. Now we ask: How do these two things happen? The answer is expressed exactly in the little word 'thus' with which the sentence begins, and which connects the words we are explaining with those immediately preceding them. The Constitution has just shown how tradition makes the sacred writings more profoundly understood and unceasingly active. So it is by means of this function of tradition that the colloquy between God and the Church is brought about, and the Holy Spirit leads believers into all truth. In other words, by making the written word of God more profoundly understood and active among the faithful, tradition fosters this colloquy between God and the Church and the action by which the Holy Spirit leads believers into all truth. Here there are two statements: (1) A direct assertion that tradition has its own proper function in bringing about this colloquy and this action of the Holy Spirit; (2) An indirect reference to the instrument by which the colloquy of God with the Bride of his Son is brought about and of which the Holy Spirit makes use in order to lead believers into all truth: this instrument is Scripture. Indeed God continues to talk with the Bride of his Son, and the Holy Spirit to lead believers into all truth, because and in so far as tradition makes the Scriptures more profoundly understood and unceasingly active. So it is by means of this that the written word of God needs some help from tradition in order to bring about the colloquy between God and the Church so that the Holy Spirit may lead believers into all truth; at the same time the supreme excellence of the written word of God has been affirmed: in and through it (explained and made effective by tradition) God himself continues to speak to the Church; through it the Holy Spirit leads believers into all truth.

(2) Having looked at the general purport of the passage, let us go on to consider its details. First of all we note the words: 'God who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of his beloved Son'. This statement starts from the assumption, which is explained in the next chapter of the Constitution, that Holy Scripture is the word of God both as to its content—in as much as it refers specifically to what God has said to men throughout the ages—and formally, in that God is, by virtue of the gift of inspiration, its 'literary' author. In this sense it is true that when the Church is reading Scripture, it reads what God has written, and so 'God talks with the Bride of his Son'. later, the document returns to this point once more and says very precisely: 'In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them' (no. 21). The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* says that in the Liturgy Christ is present in his words, as well as in other ways, 'since it is he himself who speaks when the Scriptures are read in the Church' (*Liturgy*, no. 7).

Let us at this point reflect for a moment on the magnitude of the gift which God has thus given to men in his written word. He has devised this marvellous gift so as to be able to perpetuate with the Church, throughout her pilgrimage here on earth, this colloquy in which he speaks to men as friends and is present with them to call and admit them to fellowship with himself (cf. no. 2). The members of the Church have thus no ground for envying those generations to whom the prophets spoke. In Scripture God has in fact set forth the messages of the prophets and has established them with words which are formally his own, since they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. In this way God has also confirmed with his own words the preaching of Christ himself.

(3) We now turn to the words of our text which concern the work of the Holy Spirit. The text says: 'Thus the Holy Spirit, through the living voice of the gospel, resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads believers into all truth and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (cf. Col. 3: 16)' (no. 8). These words mean, first, that the Holy Spirit leads believers into all truth and fills them with the word of Christ, since tradition explains more profoundly and makes more effective the written word of God. And why? Because it is by means

of the Holy Spirit that the living voice of the gospel, or rather the preaching of the successors of the apostles, resounds in the Church and through her in the world. It is easy to see the reason for this last statement. It is simply a conclusion from the teaching of the New Testament, according to which all the works of the apostles and their successors are wrought entirely in the light and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we wish briefly to sketch that teaching here.

As the apostles became witnesses of Jesus to the ends of the world only when they had been clothed with power of the Spirit (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; I Pet. 1:12), so also the works of their successors are entirely under the direction and illumination of the same Spirit. Indeed it is clear that the promises of Christ about the help of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17, 25-26; 15:26; 16:12-14) have a greater meaning for the apostles in that Christ promised a special help to them, because they had gradually to put together the deposit of revelation and to entrust it to the Church. But it is also clear that the words do not refer to the apostles alone. They must apply to their successors also, for it is these who have to be witnesses of Jesus 'to the ends of the earth', preserving the divine revelation in its purity, explaining and handing it on from generation to generation. The *Constitution on the Church* echoes the New Testament on this. After having stated: 'For the discharging of such great duties, the apostles were enriched by Christ with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them' (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:4; John 20:22-23;), it immediately adds that the same apostles 'passed on this spiritual gift to their helpers by the imposition of hands (cf. I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6-7), and it has been transmitted to us in episcopal consecration' (*Church*, no. 21). Consequently, a little later on the same Constitution solemnly states: 'It is clear that, by means of the imposition of hands and the words of consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is so conferred and the sacred character so impressed, that the bishops in an eminent and visible way undertake Christ's own role as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest, and that they act in his person' (*ibid.*).

(4) To sum up briefly the teaching of the Constitution on the function of tradition is respect of Holy Scripture, we may say:

(a) The fact that the written word of God needs the contribution of tradition so as to be recognized for what it is and to be more profoundly and effectively understood, assuredly indicates a certain deficiency in God's written word. But such a weakness is common to all human writings, in as much as they all need to be interpreted and explained. That need grows proportionately with the distance, in time and mentality, between the author of a book and his reader. It is almost infinitely increased by the fact that Holy Scripture does not reflect human thoughts but the thoughts of God, and indeed speaks of 'those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind. The more difficult the subject is, the more difficult is its interpretation. If therefore God has deigned to speak to men in a human way, by means of the writings of men, he has undoubtedly allowed his word to have this 'deficiency', and to need a living explanation which would make it more profoundly understood and made effective for the lives of men. After all, this is no more than a particular application of the principle that God has willed to speak to men through men.

(b) Yet while the document admits this weakness in God's written word, it proclaims in the same context its sublime dignity. The fact is that tradition, guided and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, who interprets and makes active the written word of God, does no less than ensure that by means of the sacred writings God himself continues to speak to the Bride of his Son and that the Holy Spirit by the same written word of God leads believers into all truth and feeds them with the word of Christ. In other words, tradition, in all that it does to further God's written word, acts, to use a biblical comparison, like the 'friend of the bridegroom' (John 3:29); it co-operates to bring about the living contact of God with the Bride of his beloved Son, the Church; it plays its part so that the Bride may understand all truth and so that the Bridegroom, who is Truth itself, may wholly reveal himself in the Holy Spirit to his beloved Bride, the Church.

(c) Here is seen the great, and indeed the decisive importance which the written word of God has for tradition, or rather, practically speaking, for those who have to preach the gospel. Holy Scripture is *par excellence* the instrument with which they must promote the colloquy between God and the Bride of Christ, the Church, the instrument which they must use so that the Holy Spirit may gradually lead believers into all truth (cf. no. 21).

Tradition and Scripture make up a single whole

The subject of the preceding paragraph now naturally leads our document to define more precisely the relations which exist between tradition and Holy Scripture. From the preceding paragraph it does in fact follow that 'there thus exist a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Holy Scripture' (no. 9). That statement is partly the result of what had gone before (hence the 'thus'). There it had been shown that tradition grows with reflection and meditation and so with increasing understanding of the things and words handed down from the apostolic preaching. Among these things and words we must certainly include Holy Scripture, for it too is the fruit of obedience to Christ's command to preach the news of salvation. Besides, from the explanation, which we have just seen, of the way in which tradition makes the written word of God more profoundly understood and effective, we perceive, on the one hand, the assistance which tradition gives to Scripture, and on the other the fact that the written word of God is the principle means by which the successors of the apostles co-operate in bringing about the meeting and colloquy between the Church and the heavenly Father: Scripture is the principle instrument through which the Church co-operates with the Holy Spirit in the work of leading believers into all truth. To these considerations the Constitution adds further details and then deduces certain practical consequences.

(1) Why and in what sense have tradition and Holy Scripture 'a close connection and communication' with each other (no. 9)? The Constitution answers: 'Both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend towards the same end.' There is then a unity of source and a unity of end. The document explains this by using as a common denominator the term 'word of God'. Like Holy Scripture, tradition also is in its own way a 'word of God'; 'Holy Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it was put into writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. To the successors of the apostles, sacred tradition hands on in its full purity God's word which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and by the Holy Spirit. Thus, led by the Spirit of truth, these successors can in their preaching preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it and make it more widely known' (no. 9).

Note that the cardinal idea in the explanation of both Scripture and of tradition is that of the word of God.[15] It is therefore on this that the Council takes its stand so as to explain the close unity of these two. With regard to Scripture, there is nothing to add. It is formally the word of God precisely because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Let us then look at tradition. This too, says the text, has many and deep relations with the word of God. It is true that this, in so far as it is the vehicle of thought, is a truly human word, but the thought is none other than the word of God, i.e. that which God spoke by means of the prophets and then in Christ, intending it for the whole human race. In this sense then tradition brings God's word to men. Furthermore, tradition does not hand on only the oral preaching of the apostles, but also the written word of God himself, presenting to men the sacred books as such, and explaining and making effective what they contain. In this sense it 'hands on the word of God in its fulness'. Again, this instrument is not in fact an entirely human instrument, but rather one which acts on behalf of and in the name of Christ, the bishops, as successors of the apostles, having received their mandate from the apostles, who in their turn were sent on their way by Christ; furthermore, this instrument acts 'under the light of the Holy Spirit' to ensure that those who have the task 'may in their preaching faithfully preserve, explain and make more widely known' the word of God to mankind. All these facts, the mandate from Christ, the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and above all the matter which is being handed on, confer on tradition not only the gift of truth but also a special sacred character. This explains why the New Testament does not hesitate to describe as the 'word of God' the preaching of salvation or rather the oral transmission of revelation.[16]

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[15] To make this clear we have made here our own translation which is closer to the original Latin.

(2) The Council draws from its exposition two practical conclusions:

(a) The first has to do with the certainty of the Church about the content of revelation: 'It is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed.' It is well known that this passage was debated for a long time in the Council's Commission on Doctrine which prepared the text of this Constitution. Its exact wording results from the course of this debate which has now been made public,[17] and from the text itself. The Council wished to emphasize the fundamental importance of tradition, without however deciding the question which Catholics still debate on the so-called 'sufficiency of Holy Scripture', whether, that is to say, all revealed truths are at least implicitly contained in the written word of God, or whether on the contrary, some of them are received by the Church from oral tradition alone.

It is for this reason that this rather 'wide' formula was chosen. It means first that God has not entrusted the handing down of revelation to men to the written word alone. Tradition too has

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[16] Cf. for example, I Thess. 2:13; Acts 6:7; 13:49; II Tim. 2:9; Tit. 2:5; and also the 'preaching of Christ' of Rom. 10:17.

[17] The question freely discussed among Catholics is not a matter of knowing the canon of the sacred books. The Constitution has already stated above (no. 8) that it is from tradition that the Church knows the whole canon of Scripture. Nobody maintains that the canon is listed in the sacred books or that it can be known as such from them.

an essential part to play. Next, the chosen formula does not speak of 'knowledge' of the truths revealed and does not therefore refer to the content of Holy Scripture and its individual truths; it speaks of 'certainty'. Thus it has no bearing on the discussion on the sufficiency of Scripture; nor does it present tradition as a quantitative compliment which adds something to the truths contained in Scripture; nor on the other hand is Scripture presented as if it were the complete codification of the whole of revelation, in which case tradition would have no other function than that of spreading, preserving and interpreting the written word of God.

(b) The paragraph ends with the assertion that 'both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same devotion and reverence'. These words, taken from a document of the Council of Trent which deals with our subject (cf. *Denz.*, 783), obviously do not mean that Scripture is being denied that unique character which makes it formally the word of God, for that would be to deny all that had gone before, but are intended simply to affirm that tradition deserves all our respect and reverence, since it too is in its own way the word of God because of its content; it too transmits the divine teaching in its entirety and speaks in the name of God and Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who guides and enlightens it.

The word of God entrusted to the Church

Having explained the substantial unity of Scripture and tradition and their mutual relations, the Council turns to an exposition of the relationship of both with the Church and particularly with the Church's teaching office, ending with a broad survey of all those elements which make up the transmission of divine revelation. By way of introduction the Council first states as a conclusion to the last paragraph that 'Sacred tradition and Holy Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God' (no. 10). Although this statement is only the conclusion of the last paragraph, it nonetheless deserves to be heavily underlined, for too often in the past many people have made the mistake of thinking, notwithstanding the teaching of the New Testament, that 'the word of God' is exclusively that which is written.

(1) In what sense has this deposit been entrusted to the Church? The Constitution has already several times emphasized the function which the successors of the apostles, and after them the college of bishops, have with regard to the word of God; it has stated in general terms the facts that the Apostles left as their successors the bishops (no. 7; cf. also no. 9); it has explained in detail that tradition is carried on 'through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession a sure gift of truth' (no. 8). Now the need to emphasize this unique function of the bishops has sometimes given rise to misunderstanding, as though the deposit of faith were simply and solely entrusted to the hierarchy, and as though the latter alone were responsible for the task of transmitting, preserving and spreading it abroad. For this reason the Council has already (no. 8) felt the need to stress the function of the whole people of God in this field. In the same way, at this point, before setting out in further detail the functions of the teaching office of the Church with regard to the deposit of faith, the Council emphasizes that it was entrusted to the Church as such and describes its vital function in the life of the people of God: 'Holding fast to his deposit, the entire holy people united with their shepherd remain always steadfast in the teaching of the apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of bread and in prayers, (cf. Acts 2:42; Greek text), so that in holding to, practising and professing the heritage of the faith, there results on the part of the bishops and the faithful a remarkable common effort' (no. 10). From these words it is obvious that it is the whole people of God which must be loyal in faith and practice to this sacred deposit so that it may always be for all generations like the primitive community in Jerusalem, of which it was said that they were 'of one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32), 'devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42).[18] Note that the document, while affirming the essential relationship between this deposit and the whole people of God, does not ignore, even in this context, the special function of the hierarchy in it. It speaks in fact of the holy people 'united with their shepherds' and states the need to achieve 'a common effort of bishops and faithful'. Yet in affirming the function of the shepherds, the document does not separate this from that of the people, but sees it in the framework of the living unity of the Church.[19]

(2) What we have said should be enough to obviate any misunderstanding about the doctrine which the Constitution has been setting forth on the relationship of the teaching office to tradition and Scripture, or rather to the whole deposit of the word of God, written or handed down. With regard to this relationship the document first affirms the fact that the *Magisterium* is the only authentic interpreter of the deposit and then goes on to give further details of the function of the *Magisterium* so as to avoid possible misunderstanding.

(a) The living *Magisterium* is the only authentic interpreter: 'The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ' (no. 10). From the whole context of the chapter we are expounding it is clear that those who exercise this living teaching office of the Church are the successors of the apostles, the college of bishops, with the successor of Peter, the Pope, at their head. The different ways in which this living teaching office has been exercised in practice are sufficiently explained in the Council's *Constitution on the Church*. The matter of which the teaching office is the authentic interpreter is the whole of the deposit of the word of God written or handed down. It is not a question of any sort of interpretation—e.g. the document itself speaks in the next chapter of the importance of the work of exegetes in the interpretation of the written word of God—but of an *authentic* interpretation, which is binding upon the people of God and accepted by it with faith as the true meaning of God's revelation.

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[18] Acts 2:42, in the original Greek text which is here followed by the Constitution and differs from the Latin of the vulgate.

[19] *A propos* this concept the Constitution refers among other things to St Cyprian's well known description of the Church as 'the people united with the priest and the flock closely attached to its shepherd'.

The document does not here produce proofs for its statements about the teaching authority being the sole authentic interpreter of the word of God. The reason is that here we are concerned only with a re-statement of what is already contained in the basic fact explained at the beginning of this chapter. The apostles did indeed entrust to their successors not only a certain body of doctrine but also 'their own teaching role' (no. 7), that is the command they received from Christ, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matt. 28:19-21). Now it is clear that such a task involves not only handing on the object of revelation, but also explaining it authentically—binding men in conscience to accept it with faith, according to their culture and mentality and the differences of place and time.[20]

The fact then that the living teaching authority of the Church shares in the command given by Christ to the apostles shows also that its function 'is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ'

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[20] It is interesting and encouraging, that the belief in the necessity of some such authoritative *Magisterium* of the Church to explain the faith with authority, is gaining ground even in the Protestant world. A recent and significant example of this is the Protestant Bishop of Hanover, Dr. Lilje, who brought this out in a pastoral letter this year about the so-called 'new theology'. His argument is as follows: the question of the doctrinal authority of the Church has arisen everywhere. Men are asking why ecclesiastical authority remains silent. It is interesting that neither party in the controversy has any doubt about its being the business of the ecclesiastical authority, that is, of the persons invested with it, to give the community of the faithful a clear answer to the questions which trouble it. If it is true that every preacher of the gospel shares in the doctrinal authority of the Church when he is in the pulpit, his responsibility for what is being taught from the pulpit is clearer than ever; there is then no room in the Church for irresponsibility and for a theological pluralism. Those who wish seriously to maintain the new theology in the Church and its pulpits need to take account of the consequences which would follow if they went so far as to allow the tradition of the Church to be treated in such a way as to destroy its own premises. That would mean the abandonment of the ecclesiastical traditions of the past and indeed the end of theology.

(no. 10). Jesus did in fact preface his command to the apostles with these words: 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'; it is by virtue of this authority that he sent the apostles to proclaim salvation. In another place he had already said to the apostles: 'He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me' (Luke 10:16; cf. John 20:21: 'As the Father has sent me, even so send I you').

(b) What is the exact function of the living teaching authority of the Church as interpreter of the word of God? We know that the Catholic doctrine on this subject has been the object of bitter attacks throughout the centuries. It is objected that here a human teaching office sets itself up as judge of the word of God; instead of submitting to it and allowing itself to be judged by it the *Magisterium* presumes to domineer over it, etc. For this reason the Constitution sets out to define this doctrine accurately in order, as far as possible, to prevent these and other similar misunderstandings.

First it confirms that the *Magisterium* 'is not above the word of God but serves it' (no. 10). The idea of 'service', that is, that the members of the hierarchy 'are servants of their brethren, so that all who are of the people of God, and therefore enjoy a true Christian dignity, can work towards a common goal freely and in an orderly way, and arrive at salvation', has been repeatedly re-affirmed in the *Constitution on the Church* (nos. 18, 24, 32). Here it has been applied to the relationship of the teaching authority to the word of God. When preaching the gospel the bishops work in the service of Christ their master. Thus St Paul introduced himself at the beginning of his letters as the 'servant of Christ' and as such brought the message of Christ to men (cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; I Cor. 4:1) and thus the apostles are called 'ministers of the word' (Luke 1:2; cf. Acts 26:16).

This service then has its deep roots in the humble 'obedience of the faith'. The bishops, even before and more than other members of the Church, are bound to offer to God who reveals himself the humble obedience of faith, of which we have spoken above, and which involves total abandonment to God and 'the full submission of intellect and will' (no. 5). Therefore the document, in defining the function of the teaching office, stresses the fact that it 'listens devoutly' to the word of God; before preserving and explaining it, it listens to it with faith, and from that faith, with the special assistance of the Holy Spirit, proceed all the other duties of its office. The same thought is expressed in the very first words of this Constitution, where the Council solemnly declares: 'Hearing the word of God with reverence . . . the most sacred synod takes its direction . . .' (no. 1), expressing in this way the fact that everything which the Council puts forward in this Constitution springs from the deep faith of its members in the word of God. The same absolute fidelity in expounding the word of God, which is also fidelity to the command received from Christ, has nonetheless its deepest roots in complete faith in the revelation of God, fortified and sustained in a special way by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the task of the teaching office is well defined and circumscribed. The meaning of the mandate which the bishops have received from Christ through the apostles is not to add to the word of God which they have received ingenious explanations or speculations or anything else of their own, but simply and solely to hand on and expound the word of God as they have received it; without any addition or alteration. We have seen above, when explaining the idea of tradition as it appears in the New Testament, how sternly the apostles were ordered to hand on faithfully what they had received. In this sense our document says that the teaching office serves the word of God 'teaching only what has been handed on' (no. 10). True, tradition must advance, inasmuch as the understanding of the things and words handed on must grow (cf. no. 8), but this understanding, if it is to be true, means the full preservation of the word of God in its purity. The *Magisterium* then fulfils its mandate in so far as it 'guards scrupulously and explains faithfully' the word of God, and 'from this one deposit of faith draws everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed' (no. 10).[21]

Here also we see once more that the affirmations of the Constitution about the task of the living teaching office of the Church as interpreter of the word of God, are simply a more profound analysis of the key fact with which this chapter started, namely, that Christ commissioned the apostles to transmit the good news in the first instance by preaching, that is by oral transmission, and that they passed on that commission to their true successors. Preaching is not in fact a dead and mechanical transmission of words without caring whether the audience understands them or not, but rather a living, personal communication of thought; therefore it is accompanied by fitting explanations, corresponding to the capcity of the people, so that they may understand them and welcome them with the 'obedience of faith', that is with full submission not only of the will but also of the intellect, a submission which is a part of the total abandonment of man to God who reveals himself.

(4) It will be said that these explanations are very fine and precise, but there still remains the frailty, if not actually also the ill will of the human instrument, to which this sublime and awe-inspiring task is entrusted. This without doubt is true. For this reason the Constitution never wearies of stressing again and again that the fulfilling of this task is accomplished 'with the assistance of the Holy Spirit', 'under the illumination of the Holy Spirit', and so on. This and this alone is the ultimate guarantee: if God asks the members of the Church to welcome the preaching and interpretation of his word made by the successors of the apostles and put forth in his name, with the faith which is due to his own words, then he—who cannot lead us into error—owes it to himself and to us to guarantee with his omnipotence that this preaching shall remain effectively faithful to truth and to his revelation. Christ himself gave us that

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[21] From the context it is clear that we are dealing with the function of the *Magisterium* in the post-apostolic Church, when the deposit of faith had been definitely formulated and completed. The apostles at this point were able to draw upon a revelation received directly from God.

guarantee, when he promised, after his command to the apostles, his lasting and unfailing help: 'Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age' (Matt. 28:20). In these words he promised the apostles and their successors to send them the Spirit of truth who would remain with them for ever and would 'lead them into all truth' (cf. John 14:26; 16:12-15). We can then rest assured that the living teaching office of the Church by virtue of that divine assistance does in practice 'guard scrupulously and explain faithfully' the word of God.

The human-divine character of the transmission of revelation

The chapter we have been explaining ends with a short summary listing three factors which co-operate in the transmission of the message of salvation and affirms their close connection with one another: 'It is clear therefore that sacred tradition, holy Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls' (no. 10). It is an effective and precise conclusion which has no need of comment, so clearly is it derived from the whole of the chapter which we have been expounding. The best method of illustrating it is to sum up the results of the whole of the present chapter in the light of the psychological-historical reflection with which we began it.

First let us state that Christ chose for the transmission of revelation the method of living transmission, that is by men trained for the purpose (the apostles) who would in turn hand on their commission to other suitably trained men. He himself prepared the twelve for this work, and when he had so prepared them commanded them to preach the tidings of salvation. Yet, as had happened with the Old Testament, the living transmission was very soon completed with the written word, upon which the special gift of inspiration conferred the greatest possible guarantee of fidelity to the truth.

In this fundamental design of Christ is contained everything which this chapter has tried to expound and specify. Nevertheless, as we have seen, such an explanation is by no means easy. If we wish to summarize briefly its various aspects, we may say that we need to preserve the equilibrium in three different ways.

First, the equilibrium between the faithful preservation of the deposit of the word of God and its living explanation and growing understanding. 'Tradition' means the handing on of what has been received, and Scripture too serves to 'fix' once and for all certain facts, doctrine, etc. Hence a man is in danger of mistaking transmission for immobility, like the mechanical transmission of some formula which no longer says anything to anybody. Therefore the Constitution reminds us that in tradition there must be progress, since the understanding of what was transmitted must grow with reflection, meditation, study, experience and preaching. Tradition must be a living tradition, for it is concerned with handing on something spiritual. Further it must be a life-giving tradition, which gives an ever greater depth to our understanding of the written word, both in itself and as a call from God to men of every age so that the word may become effective; in this way tradition must cooperate in bringing about a permanent colloquy between God and the Church,—the Bride of Christ; it must co-operate with the Holy Spirit so as to lead believers into all truth.

We must also maintain an equilibrium between the tasks which concern the whole people of God and those which are the particular duty of the pastors. It is true that Christ entrusted the transmission of the divine revelation to the apostles and to their successors in the episcopate, but in them and by their means he entrusted his word to the Church, to the whole people of God. The whole people of God, in union with its pastors, must cling to the word of God; it is the pastors and the living teaching authority of the Church that must interpret the word of God with authority, but all, bishops and faithful together, must keep, practise and profess the faith which is handed on; in this way it is the whole Church which perpetuates and transmit to all generations everything which she is and believes, so that in her the words of God may be brought to their fulfilment.

Lastly, in describing the transmission of the tidings of salvation from generation to generation, it is necessary to take account of the human element as well as of the divine. As Christ in the Incarnation willed to make himself like us in all things but Sin, (cf. Heb. 4:15), so he willed too that the transmission of revelation in his Church should be effected by a truly human method and by truly human means. But on the other hand as Christ came to make men partakers in his Godhead and conformed to his own image as the Son of God, so he willed too that the transmission of revelation, made by men in a human way, should be permeated by grace, by his influence and by that of the Holy Spirit so that its truth and holiness might be wholly safeguarded. So as to bring this about, he promised the apostles and their successors his own assistance, always present and active, and also the guidance and light of the divine Spirit of truth. This guidance and this light of the Spirit of Christ extend as much to the transmission as to the interpretation of the whole sacred deposit; indeed in Scripture the assistance of the Holy Spirit even confers the special gift of inspiration, by which God himself becomes the 'literary' author of the writings and their text truly becomes the word of God. It is only by virtue of all this generous and permanent assistance given by Christ and in the light of the Holy Spirit that the accurate preservation of the tidings of salvation is safeguarded and that at the same time its effective vitality and the continual advance of the Church in the understanding of its inner content is guaranteed. This divine-human transmission is the fitting and effective means by which God continues to speak with the Bride of his only-begotten Son, and by which the Holy Spirit leads believers into all truth and brings them gradually in the Church to the fulfilment of the words of God.

7 | Sacred Scripture, our inspired and infallible guide

After the Constitution has in the first chapter explained the general idea of divine revelation, its progressive fulfilment in the history of mankind and the response which this manifestation of God requires from men, the whole of the rest of the document is taken up with the explanation of the means provided by God in order to ensure that this treasure of revelation shall be handed down to all generations. Chapter 2 of the Constitution offered us a general account of the means granted to us by Christ: the live transmission of the word of God, both preached and written. It also illustrated the various aspects of this live transmission, particularly with regard to the written word. The rest of the document sets out to speak more fully of the written word and of its function in the Church. This takes up four out of the six chapters of the document. The large space thus reserved for Scripture is in itself of great significance as illustrating the intentions of the Council. The chapter we are about to study (chapter 3) takes us into the very heart of the mystery of Scripture, explaining its divine inspiration and the way in which it is to be interpreted.

Because of the abundance of the material to be considered we have divided the explanation into two chapters: in this one we shall speak of inspiration and of its consequence—the inerrancy of Scripture,[1] leaving the question of interpretation to the chapter which follows.

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[1] Besides the books mentioned in the general bibliography the student may in this connection be referred to the author's special studies: 'Inspiration' in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche;* 'Die Instrumentalitätsidee in der Inspirations-turae, *Herkunft und Bedeutung der Formel*, in: *Angelicum* 20, Rome 1943, lehre, in *Studia Anselmiana* 27-28 Rome 1951 pp. 47-65; 'Deus auctor S. Scripturae, Herkunft und Bedeutung der Formel, in *Angelicum* 20, Rome 1943 pp. 16-31.

It is easy to see in what terms the question presents itself. We have already seen, in the preceding chapter of the Constitution, the fact that some apostles, and some men in their immediate circle, 'through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing' (no. 7). We have also seen that apostolic preaching is 'expressed in a special way in the inspired books', and that 'Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit' (no. 9). Finally, this chapter teaches us that by means of the written word of God—'more profoundly understood and increasingly made active' through tradition—'God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of his beloved Son', and 'the Holy Spirit . . . leads believers into all truth, and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them' (no. 8). Now we must ask: What *is* this 'inspiration of the Holy Spirit' which enables a man to write a divine book which not only describes the revelation of God, but also actually speaks of God himself? Moreover, since the function of Scripture is to hand down to all mankind the authentic revlation of God, we must ask how it can guarantee this transmission. Finally, how is Holy Scripture to be explained and interpreted, since God himself is its author? It is obvious that the reply which the Council gives to these questions is of decisive importance. It shows in what way God has ensured that men shall receive no counterfeit message but his authentic revelation. It shows too what man must do to comprehend it rightly.

'Sacred and canonical books'

Chapter 3 begins by taking for its thesis what the Constitution has already asserted about Holy Scripture: 'Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in sacred Scripture had been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit' (no. 11). Then it goes on to explain this assertion by first of all indicating which these books are and why they are considered to be 'sacred and canonical', and then by explaining how these books came to be written with

God as their author, that is, explaining the process of 'inspiration'.

Which and what are the books of Scripture? The Constitution replies with a sentence which, even in its literal form, appears as the justification of the affirmation above: 'Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the apostles, holds that the books of both the Old and the New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical.' And why? 'Because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 20:31; II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:19-21) they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself' (no. 11).

These words are substantially quoted from the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith,* of the First Vatican Council, as we shall explain further on. They describe first of all what is so to speak materially included in the term 'the sacred Scripture of the Old and New Testaments'; then they define the sacred books, explaining the meaning of the words 'sacred and canonical'; finally, they indicate the source from which the Church derives all her knowledge of the 'canon of sacred Scripture', that is, of the complete list of inspired books and their nature: this source is the 'belief of the apostles'.

(1) Concerning the last mentioned term we need say only that the words 'the belief of the apostles' are not to be found in the document of the First Vatican Council, being added by Vatican II. Furthermore we must point out that these words in practice merely repeat what was already stated in the preceding chapter of the Constitution, that is, that it is through tradition that 'the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known' (no. 8). In fact, as this tradition goes back in the last analysis to the first apostles, so also the Church's knowledge of the inspired books, of their significance and nature, rests upon apostolic belief. It is however necessary, now that we begin to study more fully the problem of inspiration, to indicate once more and very explicitly the source of the Church's knowledge, in order to create the necessary understanding, and so that the quotations from

Scripture in this present chapter may not be misunderstood.[2]

(2) With regard to what we may call the material description of Scripture, we note that the Constitution, quoting from the above-mentioned document of Vatican I, has omitted, after the words 'with all their parts' the following qualification: 'Books that are listed in the Decree of this same Council (i.e. the Council of Trent, cf. E.B. 57, to which the document of Vatican I refers) and are found in the ancient Latin vulgate edition' (E.B. 77). The relevant decree of the Council of Trent contained the complete list of the books of Scripture (cf. E.B. 58). So we see that Vatican II rightly considered that the canon, that is, the list of sacred books, was so well known and fixed that there was no need to repeat it again.

(3) Why are these books considered to be 'sacred and canonical'? First of all let us say something about the meaning of the adjective 'canonical'. The word is of Greek origin (*canon* means rule or norm), it indicates that a certain thing corresponds or conforms to a fixed rule. In the present case it means that a book has all the qualities needed for a norm of faith. These qualities are pointed out in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation,* where it gives the reasons why the Church considers these books to be 'sacred and canonical'.

These reasons are three, all closely inter-connected. First of all, the books were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; secondly, and in consequence of this, these books, being divinely inspired, have God as their author; the third reason depends upon the fact that these books were given to the Church 'as such', that is, as being divinely inspired and with God as their author. Concerning this last point we point out that if, by hypothesis, some books were inspired by God but not recognized by the Church as such, they would be sacred but they could not be 'canonical', that is, they could not represent a norm or rule of faith because, not being recognized by the Church as the word of God, they would not be acknowledged as such.

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[2] Cf. in this connection note 14.

The mystery of inspiration

We now come to the central theme of our chapter,—the mystery of the way in which God 'inspires' the human authors of the sacred books. It is very important to affirm first of all—an assertion which we shall prove later on—the infinite distance (literally infinite!) which separates any 'inspiring' human action and the divine action of which we shall now speak. It is often said for example, that an artist is inspired by another man's work or another man's idea. Even when these cases show a very profound influence this influence never remotely resembles the profundity and efficacy of the inspiring action of the Holy Spirit. In fact, as we have already seen (no. 11), and as we shall prove later on, this inspiration is such that, by reason of it God himself becomes the author of the work. Such an influence is possible only to divine omnipotence. Let us try then, as far as is humanly possible, to understand a little more of this mystery and of what the Constitution has to say about it, remembering that the document merely sums up what we find written in the Scriptures themselves. From the outset, however, we must however bear in mind that here we have a true mystery, the existence of which we can clearly affirm, but the full understanding of which is beyond our power, just as we fail to understand God, and his omnipotence.

The Constitution briefly explains the powers of inspiration: 'In composing the sacred books, God chose men who, while employed by him, made use of their powers and abilities, so that with him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, wrote down all and only those things which he wanted to be written' (no. 11).

As the footnotes to this text point out, the various quotations used therein are taken partly from the Scriptures and more frequently from earlier documents issued by the *Magisterium* of the Church, especially from the two great biblical encyclicals, *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII, rightly called the *Magna Carta* of biblical studies, and *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII, which gave a new and decisive impulse to Catholic biblical research. Therefore we shall consider our text first of all in the light of earlier documents of the *Magisterium*; then, looking beyond the few biblical texts quoted in the document, we shall endeavour briefly to show that the doctrine here presented is in fact to be found in Scripture, or better, that the Constitution merely sums up biblical doctrine concerning the inspiration of the sacred books.

(1) We begin with a concept which is substantially expressed in the document, although it is not called by its technical name: the concept of the 'instrument'. This concept means that the human authors of the sacred books are 'instruments' in the hands of God, the principal author of these writings. That this idea of instrumentality is substantially expressed in our documents is shown by the words: 'God chose men . . .' and 'with him acting in them and through them.'[3]

(a) The encyclical *Divino Afflante* points out that one of the providential results of recent theological research has been that, following the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, it has studied 'the nature of biblical inspiration and its effects' (E.B. 556). The encyclical continues: 'Starting from their initial principle that the authors of the sacred books were tools or instruments of the Holy Spirit—living instruments endowed with reason—Catholic theologians rightly observe that, under the divine inspiration, they make such use of their own faculties and powers that all who read their books may perceive their individual characteristics and nature.'[4]

(b) We see that the passage we have just quoted from *Divino Afflante* explicitly affirms not only that the sacred authors were used by God as 'living instruments endowed with reason', but also that 'under the divine inspiration they made such use of their own faculties and powers' that the books born of this co-operation clearly show each human author's individual characteristics. A clear proof of this is seen in all the literary critics' 'introductions' to the individual books of the Old and New Testaments, in which, with the aid of extracts taken from their writings, the personalities of the human authors are clearly portrayed.

The encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* was careful to point out that according to St Jerome the human author's co-operation with the Holy Spirit was essentially free: '. . . St Jerome has no doubt that every author of these books co-operated freely and willingly with God, who inspired him, according to his powers and his own nature' (E.B. 448). The affirmation of this freedom is implicitly contained also in the above-mentioned text of the *Divino Afflante*, where it is affirmed that the sacred author, inspired by God, is always a living instrument endowed with reason, who makes use of his own faculties and powers, and therefore also of his own free will (cf. E.B. 556).

(c) So far we have illustrated, from documents issued by the teaching authority of the Church before the time of the Council, the part played by the human author in the composition of the sacred books; he is used by God but used as a living instrument, in possession of his reason and of his free will, so that he is the 'real author' of what he writes. We must however at the same time point out that the human authors are only instruments used by God, who acts in them and through them so that they may write 'all and only those things which He wishes to be written' (no. 11). As the Constitution indicates in a note, this concept is taken principally from Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*. We shall quote the relevant passage at length. It is found where the document deals with the problem of the inerrancy of Holy Scripture. The Pope asserts that this inerrancy is not impaired by the fact that the Holy Spirit chose men to be his instruments, a choice which might lead us to suppose that 'some errors might have slipped in, naturally not errors on the part of the principal author, but on the part of the inspired writers' (E.B. 125). The encyclical gives its reason: 'In fact, God himself inspired and moved them to write, by his supernatural power, and so assisted them while they wrote that all those things, and only those things, which he desired to be set down, were rightly understood by them, and they desired to write them faithfully and express them in a manner conformable to infallible truth' *(ibid.)*. The encyclical concludes with decisive words: 'Otherwise God himself would not have been the author of all Holy Scripture' *(ibid.)*.

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[3] The reason why the term 'instrument' is not used in the Constitution is probably because the Council sought to describe in simple language the facts to be found in Scripture concerning inspiration—without using, except where this was absolutely necessary—the technical terms of the theological schools.

[4] *Ibid.*: the last words placed between inverted commas are taken from the encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* of Pope Benedict XV, who seeks to illustrate the doctrine and Biblical studies of St Jerome. Notice that this encyclical, written a quarter of a century before that of Pius XII, was already emphasizing the importance of the concept of 'instrumentalism' in explaining the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible—although it was Pius XII alone who drew from it all the logical consequences for the interpretation of Scripture. In fact, in explaining divine inspiration, the encyclical says: 'In order better to emphasize this collaboration between God and man in the same work, St Jerome puts forward the analogy of the workman who, in the making of any object, makes use of an instrument or of a tool; in fact, all that the sacred writers say is the word of God and not their own word, and what their own tongues say is the voice of God speaking through them as if through an instrument' (E.B. 448). Indeed already, before Benedict XV, this concept had been used by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus.* Explaining the doctrine of biblical inerrancy he referred to the idea that the Spirit has used men as instruments to write down the word of God. In this same context the Pope explained and defined the way in which the Holy Spirit works in the sacred authors (cf. E.B. 125; we shall say more about this document further on).

This is, as we see, a carefully thought out document which must be studied in detail. First of all, let us consider this 'supernatural' influence, supernatural like God's own purpose, which was to produce a book of which he himself would be the author. Let us also take note of the far reaching power of the divine inspiration, which impels the human author to write, and assists him during the whole process of the composition of the book. This inspiration, moreover, is extended to the entire text, so that the human author may write 'all and only those things' (the same expression is used in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*) which God wishes to be written; finally, the inspiration concerns as much the interior attitude of the author—that he may rightly conceive and faithfully write down what God wishes—as his essential ability to express divine things 'in a

manner conformable with infallible truth'. We note once more the encyclical's categorical assertion that what it has affirmed is but a logical consequence of the fact established by faith, that is, that God is the 'literary' author of all Scripture.[5]

(2) After having thus explained, in the light of the official teaching of the Church, the profound meaning of the brief description of the process of inspiration offered us by the Constitution, we now ask: what foundation has this doctrine in Holy Scripture? The Constitution itself quotes biblical texts which deal explicitly with certain writings composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. no. 11), and in note 3 it refers to some biblical texts which speak of the process of inspiration, saying that God has spoken by the voice of men and prophets. But these are not the only texts which speak of the subject. The scriptural basis of the doctrine we are dealing with is much broader. We shall try, within the narrow limits imposed upon us in this study, to indicate the principal scriptural texts which refer to this question.

(a) Let us begin with a text which describes an actual case of the word of God being written down by human means. The prophet Jeremiah dictated the word of God to his disciple Baruch, and sent him to read the divine message to all the people in the temple. 'Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote upon a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord which he had spoken to him. And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying: 'I am debarred from going to the house of the Lord; so you are to go, and on a fast day in the hearing of all the people in the Lord's house you shall read the words of the Lord from the scroll which you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the men of Judah who come out of their cities. It may be that their supplication will come before the Lord, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people." And Baruch the son of Neriah did all that Jeremiah the prophet ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the Lord in the Lord's house' (Jer. 36:4-8). It is obvious that Jeremiah was known and acknowledged as a prophet of the Lord. There were in fact certain criteria by which the true prophets were distinguished from the false (cf. Deut. 18:21-22) and Israel often had recourse to them in order to judge among the many who called themselves prophets. Presuming then that here we have a true prophet of the Lord, we have before us the brief description of the birth of an inspired piece of writing. Judging by external appearances, it is the prophet himself who writes, but he asserts that he writes by order of the Lord; what is written is the word of God himself, and the message is presented to the people as the word of God, or, as Jeremiah puts it, 'the words of the Lord . . . written at my dictation' (v. 6).

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[5] The reader will have noted that when we speak of God as the author we sometimes add the adjective 'literary'. This addition would not really be necessary for the modern reader, for whom the word 'author' in this context can only mean the 'literary' author. However, since some ecclesiastical documents of earlier periods spoke of God as the 'author of the Old and New Testaments', meaning that he was the author of the plan of salvation found in the Old and New Testaments, it has become customary, when speaking of God as the author of the sacred books, to add the adjective 'literary'. This shows that we are not speaking of God simply as the author of the plan of salvation, but as the author of the books themselves, and also that God did not simply create these books but inspired their writing, so that Scripture is a book 'written' by God himself, and its contents are God's own word.

(b) In what way and to what extent is this concept to be applied to Scripture in general? In order to answer this question we must refer to the various texts frequently found in the New Testament which show the way in which Christ and the apostles use and quote the Scripture of the Old Testament as the word of God.

First of all: according to the New Testament there exists a collection of writings which are called 'Scripture' or 'the Scriptures'.[6] This collection is considered to be of divine origin and to it is attributed divine authority. We read that the apostles 'believed the Scriptures' as they believed in the word of God, and this was actually said in reference to the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament (cf. John 2:22); confronted by his tempter Christ quotes some words from the Old Testament (Deut. 8:3; Wisdom 16:26 etc) as representing indisputable authority (cf. Matt. 4:4-10). In the apostolic Council of Jerusalem St James quotes various texts of the Old Testament as a final and conclusive argument in favour of the decisions they had made, and introduced these texts with the words: 'Simeon has related . . . and with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written . . .'; the quotations end with the well known expression used by Old Testament prophets to conclude the messages they had received from God: '. . . says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old' (Acts 15:15-18); (cf. also Rom. 1:17). Jesus speaks in a similar way, when he quotes Psalm 81 (82):6, saying: 'Is it not written in your Law: "I said, you are Gods? If he called them Gods to whom the word of God came (and Scripture cannot be broken) . . ." ' and Christ referred to this source also to prove his divinity (John 10:34-35).

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[6] 'Scripture': John 2:22; 10:35; Gal. 3:8, 88; I Peter 2:6; II Peter 1:20; 'Scriptures': Matt. 21:42; 22:29; John 5:39; Acts 17:2, 11; 18:24; Rom. 15:4; 'Holy Scriptures': Rom. 1:2.

The divine origin of these Old Testament books is implied also by their being called simply 'oracles of God' (Rom. 3:2) or described as 'prophetic',[7] and their words as 'prophecies' (cf. Matt. 13:14; 15:7; I Peter 1:10; II Peter 1:19-20). According to the religious terminology of Israel a 'prophet' is properly speaking a man who brings to other men the message, the word of God. Thus the word of God, because of this origin, is called a 'prophecy', not because it foretells the future.[8] This divine origin is also the reason why the Scriptures are credited with foreknowledge of the future, which is an exclusively divine attribute (cf. Gal. 3:8; John 20:9; Acts 15:15-18). This divine origin of the books of the Old Testament will be made much clearer later on.

Moreover, in a series of texts, Christ and the apostles, refer- to the Old Testament, affirm that God himself is present in these writings, because he himself speaks in them, or because the human authors speak 'in the Holy Spirit'. St Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, quoted Psalm 15 (16):8-11 and added that David, the author of the Psalm, 'being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption' (Acts 2:30, 31). Christ also, speaking of the resurrection of the dead, quoted Exodus 3:6, and said to the Jews: 'And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?"' (Matt. 22:31-32). In the same way the letter to the Hebrews introduces a quotation from Psalm 94 (95):8-11 with the words: 'the Holy Spirit says' (Heb. 3:7; 4:4-5; 9:8; 10:15). Moreover, in the gospel of St Matthew quotations from the Old Testament are introduced with the words: 'All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive..."' (1:22; cf. also 2:15).

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[7] Cf. Rom. 16:26; note particularly the familiar expression: 'the law and the prophets', used of the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament.

[8] In fact, the 'prophecies', in the Old Testament sense of the word, frequently contain no predictions of the future; foretelling the future is neither necessary nor essential for 'prophecies' in this sense.

The following texts are even clearer and more significant. In his discourse in the room of the Last Supper, before the election of a substitute for Judas, St Peter, referring to Psalm 68 (69) says: 'Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus...' (Acts 1:16-18). Note here the presence of all the characteristic marks: in the Scripture 'the Holy Spirit spoke' and 'by the mouth of David'. After Peter and John had been set free from prison the community were praying to God and quoting Psalm 2 saying: 'Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea... who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage?"' (Acts 4:24-25; cf. also Acts 28:25). Christ also, disputing with the Jews concerning his messianic office, quotes from Psalm 109: 'How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet." David himself calls him Lord, so how is he his son?' (Mark 12:36; cf. Matt. 22:43). A verse of St Peter shows us the Holy Spirit at work in the prophet's very soul. The apostle says: 'The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory' (I Peter 1:10-11).

(c) In the light of these numerous scriptural references, we can better understand the two scriptural texts which speak explicitly of the 'inspiration' of Holy Scripture. The first of these clearly describes the nature of the inspiration. The apostle Peter asserts that he will never grow tired of admonishing the faithful to lead a truly Christian life, thinking of the solem coming of the Lord. The announcement of this event, says the apostle, is attested by the fact that he, Peter, himself witnessed the majesty of Christ in his glorious transfiguration, but also by the prophecies of the Old Testament: 'And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts' (2 Peter 1:19). But in order to live by this light we must rightly understand the prophecy: therefore the apostle continues: 'First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God' (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Notice that this passage refers to written prophecy, 'contained in the Scripture'. Since the word 'prophecy', as we have already said, does not in biblical language necessarily mean a foretelling of the future, but rather a message proceeding from God, and delivered in this name, it is clear that this text can be applied to the whole of the Old Testament, although in its context it is referring to Old Testament prophecies in as much as they refer to Christ, who said to his disciples on the road to Emmaus: 'Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled' (Luke 24:44). What then is the origin of 'prophecy' in this extended sense of the word? St Peter replies both negatively and positively: 'No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man' . . . 'men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.' The word 'moved' corresponds to the Greek *feromenoi,* a verb which may be used in this form to describe a boat driven by the wind or waves (cf. Acts 27:15, 17). It was in this way that the Holy Spirit 'moved' the prophets, so that they might deliver the word of God to men.

We find the second passage in St Paul's letter to Timothy. It does not speak so clearly of the process of inspiration, but on the other hand it affirms its control over all that the Bible calls 'Scripture' or 'the Scriptures' which, because of their divine origin and authority, are considered to be the word of God. The apostle urges Timothy to be faithful, in all his apostolic labours, and to be faithful to the doctrine which he, Paul, had taught him, for he had known the 'sacred Scriptures' since his boyhood and could learn from them. He gives this reason: 'All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work' (II Tim. 3:16-17). The apostle is speaking of 'Scripture', a term we have found in the texts already quoted. In fact, in the verse immediately preceding these the apostle speaks of the 'sacred writings'.[9] The apostle says that the Scripture is *theopneustos*, which we have translated: 'inspired by God'. The Greek word might even bear the active meaning, the Scripture 'which breathes of God', but the grammatical form suggests rather the passive sense, that is, 'inspired'.[10] Moreover, in the light of the numerous texts we have already quoted from the New Testament, which refer to the sacred authors as speaking 'in the Holy Spirit', or to the Holy Spirit as speaking 'by the mouth' of the sacred authors, there remains no doubt that the verb is used to express a passive action, namely, that Holy Scripture is inspired by God.[11]

(d) Let us now add a note about something we have not sought to prove from Scripture. If anyone were to compare the scriptural texts we have quoted with what the Council document states concerning inspiration, he would soon perceive that we have not sought to prove that the human authors were the true authors of the Bible. We have not sought to prove this, because it was not necessary. Whoever examines the Bible impartially can 'easily comprehend the individual character of each of the sacred authors' is as stated in *Divino Afflante* of Pius XII (E.B. 556, cf. E.B. 448), which quotes also from the relevant encyclical of Pope Benedict XV. So it is obvious not only that scriptural writings were written by human beings, but that each author has expressed his own character in them. Unless we wish to put forward the absurd suggestion that God suspends the sacred author's use of his own faculties and at the same time miraculously confers on his work all the marks of his individual character, we must admit that the human author, although completely under the influence of divine inspiration, nevertheless makes full use of his own faculties and writes as a true author. Indeed, the real difficulty in the doctrine of inspiration lies not in proving the existence of an authentic human activity on the part of the sacred author but in proving the presence of the divine influence through which God becomes the 'literary' author of the book.

In conclusion, we note that we have found a very practical illustration of that 'apostolic belief' to which the Constitution refers as the source of the Church's teaching on the 'sacred and canonical' character of the Old and New Testament books. Sometimes this belief of the apostles is presented as a vague tradition that was certainly handed down to the Church, but no one knows where or how, the only certainty being that it began to appear at a certain moment, for example, in the writings of the first fathers, and in the documents of the Church. As we studied the biblical references to the inspiration of Holy Scripture we observed the apostolic belief expressed in the way in which Christ and the apostles use and quote the sacred books of the Old Testament, and their numerous declarations concerning these. This manner of using the Old Testament is a concrete proof that Christ and his apostles believed that Holy Scripture was the word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit.[12]

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[9] At the beginning of our commentary we translated the Greek expression *pasa graphē* with the words 'all Scripture', that is, every kind of Scripture. If the Greek expression had meant 'all the Scripture', the word *graphē* would have been preceded by the article. Our interpretation seems to us the most probable, although it is true that the translation 'all the Scripture' would lend itself better to our particular case.

[10] Cf. the examples: '*theognōstos*': 'known to God', and '*theopemptos*': 'sent by God', etc.

[11] Cf. on this point Bea, *De Scripturae Sacrae inspiratione quaestiones historicae et dogmaticae*, Rome, 1935, pp. 4, 34.

Holy Scripture is our infallible teacher

Biblical inspiration is intimately connected with the question of the firmness and faithfulness with which it hands down to man the great treasure of revelation. We are in fact still considering the transmission of divine revelation through the generations, and the function of Scripture is, as we saw in the preceding chapter, that of guaranteeing to its transmission the maximum certainty and faithfulness. Further on, the Constitution says of the divine books: 'inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God himself without change' (no. 21). The connection between this faithfulness and certainty of Holy Scripture—called by theologians 'inerrancy'—and its divine inspiration has already been pointed out several times in the documents of the *Magisterium* which we have already quoted with regard to the question of inspiration. This intimate connection appears also in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, where the relevant passage is presented as the logical conclusion of the preceding exposition of the doctrine on inspiration: 'Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation' (no. 11).

(1) First of all let us consider briefly the composition of this passage. It clearly consists of two parts: the premise and the conclusion to be deduced from it. The premise is this: 'everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit'. This statement is in its turn presented as a conclusion derived what has gone before, for it is introduced with 'therefore'. The previous argument is that if God has so moved the inspired authors that, although writing as true authors, they nevertheless wrote 'all and only those things which he wished to be written', then there can be no doubt that all that these authors assert is to be considered as asserted by the Holy Spirit which has inspired them. The second part of our text, the conclusion deduced from the premise, is this: 'the books of Scripture . . . teach firmly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation'. This conclusion presupposes a self-evident truth, which is that God surely obtains what he desires, and that he cannot make a mistake or cause a mistake to be made. This obvious presupposition is explicitly formulated further on in this same chapter of the Constitution, where it is affirmed that when God condescends to speak to men in a human manner through an inspired book, his truth and holiness must always remain inviolable (cf. no. 13). In order better to understand this doctrine on inerrancy, let us first make a few general considerations, in the light of the Church's teaching, about this fact that Scripture 'teaches firmly, faithfully and without error that truth . . .'. This is what we shall call, more briefly, the inerrancy of Scripture. Later on we shall explain in more de-

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[12] Here we see at once the precise significance of our proofs of divine inspiration, drawn from Scripture. We were not seeking to prove the doctrine of inspiration by the authority of Scripture as the word of God, since this would have begged the question. Instead, we used Scripture as a historical and trustworthy document from which we learn what Christ and the apostles thought of Scripture and how they used it. The force of our argument lay not in the fact that these texts were taken from Scripture, as being the word of God—for this had still to be proved—but in the fact that Christ and the apostles, infallible teachers of our faith, affirmed that the sacred Scriptures were the word of God and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

tail the meaning of this inerrancy, and examine the various expressions used in the Constitution.

(2) Concerning the proof of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, the document itself quotes as its foundation passages from St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas and the Council of Trent (E.B. 57; cf. also Vatican I, E.B. 77) and some recent documents of the supreme *Magisterium* of the Church.

The doctrine of inerrancy was put forward and expounded chiefly by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, which is largely dedicated to establishing and defining this doctrinal point. In the text we have already quoted with regard to inspiration, the encyclical first expounds the doctrine of inspiration in order to affirm that of inerrancy (cf. E.B. 125). It asserts: 'Therefore it is so impossible for divine inspiration to contain any error that, by its very nature, it not only excludes even the slightest error but must of necessity exclude it, just as God, the supreme truth, must also necessarily be absolutely incapable of promoting error' (E.B. 124). The encyclical therefore concludes: 'Consequently, any of who were to admit that there might be error in the authentic pages of the sacred books must certainly either betray the Catholic concept of divine inspiration or make God himself the author of error (E.B. 126). The encyclical bases this teaching on the doctrine of the Popes, from among whom it quotes largely St Gregory and St Augustine (cf. E.B. 126 et seq.). The same theme of inerrancy is fully dealt with also in the encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus*, which illustrates with particular care St Jerome's doctrine about this (cf. E.B. 450 et seq.). The teaching of Leo XIII on this question is recalled by Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante* (cf. E.B. 539; cf. also 559).

(3) The source and foundation of this conviction held by the first fathers of the Church and the *Magisterium* concerning the inerrancy of Scripture is Scripture itself, or more precisely the way in which Christ and the apostles used and quoted it, a way we have already illustrated. Here let us recall only the fact that with the words 'it is written' Christ repeatedly appealed to the Scriptures as to an irrefutable authority; he did so when tempted by Satan (Matt. 4:4-10), and when disputing with the scribes and pharisees (John 10:34-35; Matt. 22:31, 43). So also did the apostles (cf. for example Acts 15:15; Rom. 1:17 and other frequent references in Paul's letters). For the same reason it was considered necessary and inevitable that the Scripture should 'be fulfilled' (cf. Matt. 5:18-19; Luke 24:44; Acts 1:16 etc.). This argument from Scripture is summed up in the encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus*: 'Who is there who does not know and remember that when speaking to the people, either on the mountain by the lake of Genazareth, in the synagogue of Nazareth or in the city of Capernaum, Jesus Our Lord drew the principal points and proofs of his doctrine from the sacred books? Was it not from these that he took invincible weapons for his discussions with the pharisees and the sadducees? Whether he was teaching or discussing he always derived his assertions and examples from every part of holy Scripture; he refers, for example, to Jonah, to the inhabitants of Nineveh, to the Queen of Sheba and Solomon, to Elijah and Elia, to David, Noah, Lot, the inhabitants of Sodom and Lot's own wife' (E.B. 436).

(4) Let us now proceed to determine the meaning of the Constitution's doctrine on inerrancy. We have already said that it does not use here the theological term itself, but instead, for greater precision, says that the Scriptures 'teach firmly, faithfully and without error . . .'. The basic idea of the absolute truth of the Scriptures is always the same, although it may be differently expressed. The Constitution expresses most forcefully the notion that Scripture absolutely guarantees the faithful transmission of God's revelation.

On the other hand, it is more difficult to define another point of our text, that is, the object of the infallible teaching of Scripture, 'the truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation'.

(a) At first sight the meaning of these words seems clear and obvious. In fact, the whole Constitution illustrates the truth that the revelation of God is intended to bring about man's supernatural salvation. It is therefore to be expected that the truth taught by Scripture should be with reference to this salvation. Nevertheless, there is a certain difficulty here which needs to be explained. In order to understand this point let us re-consider the preparatory work for this Constitution. An earlier *schema* (the third in succession) said that the sacred books teach 'truth without error'. The following *schema,* the fourth, inspired by words of St Augustine, added the adjective 'saving',[13] so that the text asserted that the Scriptures taught 'firmly, faithfully, wholly and without error the saving truth'. In the voting which followed one hundred and eighty-four council fathers asked for the adjective 'saving' to be removed, because they feared it might lead to misunderstandings, as if the inerrancy of Scripture referred only to matters of faith and morality, whereas there might be error in the treatment of other matters. The Holy Father, to a certain extent sharing this anxiety, decided to ask the Commission to consider whether it would not be better to omit the adjective, as it might lead to some misunderstanding. After a long and wearisome debate, with much discussion and several ballots, the present text was accepted, the adjective 'saving' being omitted: 'the truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation'.[14]

(b) This incident concerns us only in so far as it helps us

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[13] This is the first Augustinian text quoted in the Constitution, note no. 5: *De Genesi ad litteram,* 2, 9, 20; P.L. 34, pp. 270 et seq.; it is the text quoted also in the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus;* this is the notion that the Spirit of God did not wish to teach us the essential nature of visible reality, because this has no importance for eternal salvation (cf. E.B. 121). This thought inspired those who prepared the text of the Constitution, especially because the Council of Trent, in speaking of this subject, mentions this point when it says that 'the Gospel is the source of all saving truth and all moral law . . .' (cf. E.B. 57; an expression which is repeated in the Constitution, no. 7.

[14] Cf. Caprile, G.,'The emendamenti', pp. 223-228; Grillmeier, pp. 136-140; Schutz-Thurian, p. 145; Galbiatti, p. 254; cf. also Stakemeier, pp. 153 et seq.; Grelob, P., 'La Constitution sur la Révélation, II: Contenu e portée du texte conciliaire', in *Etudes,* vol. 324. Feb. 1966, pp. 233-246, cf. pp. 239 et seq.; de la Poterie, I., 'La verité de la Sainte Ecriture et l'Histoire du Salut d'après la Constitution dogmatic "Dei Verbum"', in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique,* 98, 1966, pp. 149-169.

to understand more precisely the meaning of the present definitive text of the Constitution. The actual question is as follows. It is evident that the purpose which God wished to be expressed in Scripture was the revelation of God to man, in the fullest sense, a revelation by means of 'deeds and words', which aims at man's eternal salvation. Now we must consider whether the 'truth' (that is, the truth 'which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation') implies some limit set to the inerrancy of Scripture, meaning that it taught 'without error' not everything that it asserts but only all that concerns our salvation (or those things also which closely and directly affect our salvation). Let us explain at once what we mean. In order to describe those manifestations of God occurring in 'deeds and words', which form the 'history of salvation' (cf. no. 2), Scripture must necessarily set them in an authentic historical framework. Our question, therefore, about the possible existence of a limit set to inerrancy refers, not to the events in which God truly reveals himself, but to those events which form their historical setting, and which Scripture frequently describes in great detail. Does the inerrancy asserted in this document cover also the account of these historical events? In other words, is the historical background also described 'without error'?[15]

(c) For my own part I think that this question must be answered affirmatively, that is, that these 'background' events also are described without error. In fact, we declare in general that there is no limit set to this inerrancy, and that it applies to all that the inspired writer, and therefore all that the Holy Spirit by his means, affirms. And our reasons are these. First of all, the Constitution itself says that in Holy Scripture the truth and holiness of God must always remain inviolable (cf. no. 13). This thought, which re-occurs in various forms in the recent documents of the *Magisterium* of the Church (cf. E.B. 124,

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[15] We mention that this is a question of principle which does not admit of any compromise such as would, for example, be inherent in a declaration that only those events which are 'closely connected' with the history of salvation are described without error, and not those where the connection is somewhat fragile. This distinction is, at least in practice, impossible to maintain.

279, 450 et seq., 539 et seq., 559) is here clearly understood in a sense which excludes the possibility of the Scriptures containing any statement contrary to the reality of the facts. In particular, these documents of the *Magisterium* require us to recognize that Scripture gives a true account of events, naturally not in the sense that it always offers a complete and scientifically studied account, but in the sense that what is asserted in Scripture—even if it does not offer a complete picture—never contradicts the reality of the fact. If therefore the Council had wished to introduce here a new conception, different from that presented in these recent documents of the supreme teaching authority, which reflects the beliefs of the early fathers, it would have had to state this clearly and explicitly. Let us now ask whether there may be any indications to suggest such a restricted interpretation of inerrancy. The answer is decidedly negative. There is not the slightest sign of any such indication. On the contrary everything points against a restrictive interpretation. First of all: even at that stage of the discussion when the Conciliar Theological Commission put forward the term 'the saving truth', it explained that by this expression it did not mean to restrict the inerrancy of the Bible to matters of faith and morals. In order to show that this had not been its intention, it explained that the text spoke of 'truth' in the singular, not of 'truths', as if it had wished to discriminate between those which are necessary for salvation and others which are not. Moreover, in spite of this prudent explanation the word 'saving' was finally eliminated from the text and replaced with another expression, in order to prevent any possibility of implying that the inerrancy was restricted.

Does the text we have before us now imply a restrictive interpretation of inerrancy? Here also the answer is firmly negative. The first proof of this is seen in the fact that all those (and in the first place the Pope himself) who had been anxious to prevent the possible misunderstandings that might have arisen from the expression 'the saving truth' have instead accepted the present form, which means that they consider that this does not present the same danger of misunderstanding. In fact, the

phrasing we now have does not admit of any such interpretation, because the idea of salvation is no longer directly linked with the noun 'truth', but with the verbal expression 'wanted put into the sacred writings'; in other words, the phrase in which the text speaks of salvation explains God's purpose in causing the Scriptures to be written, and not the nature of the truth enshrined therein.[16]

Let us then conclude: all that the inspired writers assert is asserted through them by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, in all their assertions the sacred books teach 'firmly, faithfully and without error, what God wanted put into them for the sake of our salvation'. The paragraph we are commenting upon ends with St Paul's words: 'All Scripture is inspired by God and, useful for teaching, for reproving, for correcting and for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text)' (no. 11).[17]

The admirable 'condescension of eternal wisdom'

The chapter under consideration concludes with the study of God's way of inspiring Scripture, in the light of a more general concept of his 'condescension' to man. In this final consideration the Constitution sums up the principal notions concerning the mystery of inspiration, and of its consequence: inerrancy (the question of interpretation is not dealt with here). Let us therefore proceed with the explanation of this section of the document, which offers the best conclusion to our whole treatment of inspiration and inerrancy.

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[16] It may be explained in this way. The sentence in question, declaring that the sacred books teach 'without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation', is composed of two parts, the first of which constitutes a direct reply to the question as to what truths are taught without error by Holy Scripture. The reply is: 'that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings'. The second part, instead, answers the question about God's purpose in having this truth set down in Holy Scripture, the reply being: 'for the sake of our salvation'.

[17] We have now established the principle, or rather the fact, of biblical inerrancy, and explained its meaning. But the question has also a practical aspect, as we have still to answer certain objections regarding those things in Scripture which appear to contradict the inerrancy. That is why it is necessary to know how to interpret Scripture (we shall deal with this in the next chapter). In fact the history of exegetical criticism proves that the objections which are continually being raised against the inerrancy of Scripture are not concerned with affirmations made by the sacred authors, but with erroneous interpretations of the scriptural texts, as careful research has demonstrated. For this reason and in this sense the explanations given in the Constitution about the interpretation of the written word of God constitute, from the practical point of view, an essential complement of the doctrine of inerrancy.

(1) Here is the actual text: 'In sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remain intact, the marvellous 'condescension' of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, "so that we may learn of the loving kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far he has gone in adapting his language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature"' (no. 13). The document then explains God's action, comparing it with the Incarnation of the Word: 'For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human speech, just as of old the Word of the eternal Father, when he took to himself weak human flesh, became like other men' (*ibid.*).

(2) The idea of 'condescension' is borrowed, as the document acknowledges, from the great biblical scholar, St John Chrysostom, who uses it not only to explain God's procedure in inspiring Scripture but, in a more general way, in revealing himself to men. In his homilies on the theme of the 'incomprehensibility' of God, addressed to the Anomoeans, he considers the various ways in which God revealed himself to men, in order to show how in these manifestations God, who is invisible Spirit, deigned to adapt himself to man's condition, making himself known in a manner conformable to human nature.[18]

In recent times this idea of the great doctor was, in the encyclical *Divino Afflante*, recalled to explain the inspiration of Scripture. The encyclical, after having quoted St Thomas who said that 'in Scripture divine things are presented to us in the way which is familiar to men' gave this explanation: 'In fact, just as the essential Word of God made himself similar to men "in all things except sin" (Heb. 4:15), so also the words of God, expressed in human tongues, have been made similar to human speech in all things except error. In this we see the "condescension" of our provident God, which St John Chrystostom praised exceedingly, and which he declared was to be found in Sacred Scripture.'[19]

(3) In order to apply the idea of divine condescension more particularly to the inspiration of the sacred books, the Council, following the teaching of *Divino Afflante*, compares divine inspiration with another and even greater mystery of faith, the Incarnation of the Word. Although the Word was 'God of God, light of light, true God of true God, . . . being of one substance with the Father', as we say in the Creed, 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14), he 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form' (Phil. 2:7; cf. Heb. 2:17), 'yet without sinning' (Heb. 4:15). The same thing occurs in inspiration; God moved the sacred authors so that they would write 'all and only those things which he wished to have written' (no. 11); the thought and speech of infinite God were expressed in human tongues and have been made like human speech, . . . while the truth and holiness of God always remain intact' (no. 13). In fact, divine condescension knows but one impassable boundary: it can never go so far as to impair or put in doubt the holiness and truth of God. Hence the absolute necessity of the inerrancy of Scripture, because of which it may 'teach firmly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted written down for the sake of our salvation' (no. 11).

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[18] Cf. St John Chrysostom: *De incomprensibili (Dei natura) contra Anomaeos*, hom. 5, P.G. 48, pp. 701-748; cf. also '*Sources Chrétiennes*', no. 28. It was Fabio Fabbri who first drew attention to this important conception in 'La condescendenza divina, no. 28 nell'inspirazione biblica secondo S. Giovanni Crisostomo', in *Biblica* 14, 1933, pp. 330-347. The author points out that, apart from the references made to it by A. Vaccari, the concept had already been treated in two or three pages of '*Chrysostom: a study in the history of biblical interpretation*' by Chase, F. H., London, 1887, pp. 42 et seq.

[19] E.B. 559. The encyclical refers to a whole series of relevant texts by the great doctor. It must have been simply an oversight that the Constitution, while using the doctrine expressed in the encyclical, and even quoting its very words, referred only to St Chrysostom and not to the encyclical itself.

8 | The interpretation of Holy Scripture

Since we are considering books 'written' by God himself—although men acted as the immediate authors—we must now ask how these books are to be interpreted. We are almost in the same position as scholars faced with a work by an author whose name, nationality and epoch are unknown. All who have had anything to do with the literature of ancient times know how difficult it is in such cases to understand and interpret the work. In fact, although we are not always aware of this, it is always most useful, for our understanding of a book, to know something about the author, his ideas, his mentality, cultural background and period, etc. But in the case of Scripture all these facts and aids are lacking. Since God is the principal author, we are dealing with a book that has, so to speak, 'fallen from heaven', the divine author of which we can hardly know without the Bible itself, except for what little knowledge we can acquire from the study of the world he has created. In fact, upon this book even tradition, which is live preaching transmitting God's words to all men, is very largely based.

We now turn to another aspect of the problem of the interpretation of Scripture. It is true that God speaks to us through human authors who have clearly marked personalities and belong to well defined periods, places, etc. and that therefore, in order to understand God's words we must try to understand the human author and his writings. This, however, can be difficult.

Every one of these authors—and they are numerous, scattered over the many centuries during which the Books of the Old and New Testaments were composed—had a very limited knowledge of the whole complex process which is called the history of salvation, and so could express only a very small

part or section of it. But for us it is more important that we should have a general vision of God's plan. A broad over-all knowledge of an author's works is not only of inestimable value, but is quite indispensable for the thorough understanding of his real and authentic intention. These are the two problems now dealt with in the Constitution, as it explains how Holy Scripture is to be interpreted (no. 11 et seq.). (1) We must study very closely the human author's thought and mentality, the world in which he lived and its culture, and the particular ways of speech and expression which characterize the author and his world; all this will help us to understand what the human author really wanted to say (and therefore what God wished to tell us by his means). (2) In order to understand the general intention and thought of the primary author we must bear in mind the contents and unity of the whole Scripture, using to this end all the means at our disposal, which will be specified later on.[1]

What the inspired author really wanted to say

Dealing with this problem of the interpretation of Scripture, of which God is the primary 'literary' author, the document first of all deduces the logical consequences of the doctrine of inspiration: 'Since God speaks in sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their word' (no. 12). It is obvious that since God revealed himself in Scripture through human agents we must, in order to understand it, try first of all to understand these men of whom he made used, and their writings. But the Constitution, very significantly, insists that the interpreter must 'carefully find out what meaning the sacred writer *really* intended'.[2] Now it is true that the encyclical *Divino Afflante* quotes St Athanasius in support of its affirmation that 'the main principle of interpretation is the investigation and affirmation of what the writer is trying to say' (E.B. 557), which is fairly obvious. But why this insistence on what the inspired writers 'really' intended to say? What problem does this imply? It is a problem which, like so many others, arises when certain other questions are tackled.

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[1] Cf. Bea, *Theology Digest* I, St Mary's, Kansas.

(1) In order to give the reader a clear idea of the problem, let us quote an example of these other questions, and of how they have been resolved. We will take a simple case. Galileo's theory that the earth revolved around the sun, and not vice versa—or rather, the unfortunate manner in which this theory was presented—caused many people to have doubts about the inerrancy of the Bible. In fact, in the Book of Joshua we read that, in order to complete his victory over the Amorites, Joshua had ordered the sun to stand still and not to set, and the Bible says: 'The sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day' (Josh. 10:13). Doubts were resolved when it was understood, according to the explanation given in *Providentissimus Deus,* that God, not wishing in Scripture to teach us the essential nature of the visible world, has spoken through men in a human manner, that is according to the perception of the senses. Scripture says nothing about whether it is the sun or the earth that revolves.[3]

Another example: we know that the account in the first chapter of Genesis of the creation of the world in six days has always, and especially since the beginning of the present century, constituted a great problem because it raises the question of biblical inerrancy. The discovery of innumerable geological periods which had gradually changed the face of our planet, the disinterring of numerous species of animals and plants buried in the various geological strata, the by no means improbable theories concerning the evolution of the whole cosmos, and other similar facts, had so greatly changed man's notions of his world that the literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation having been accomplished in six days became unacceptable. Great and praiseworthy efforts were made to interpret the 'days' of creation in the sense of geological periods; other attempts at interpretation were also made, but all failed. The solution of the crucial problem—which had unhappily in many souls undermined faith in the written word of God—came only when the comparative study of similar accounts in ancient eastern literature enabled us to understand what the inspired author really wanted to say. It was then seen that in the first chapter of Genesis we have an artistic-literary construction which was intended to express the basic truth that God is the Creator of the whole universe, and also to explain the divine origin of the 'Lord's Day', the day free from work and dedicated to spiritual things, above all to the worship of God.

These two examples must suffice, although many more could be quoted to illustrate the meaning and importance of what the Constitution says about trying to find out what the inspired writers 'really' meant. And it was not merely those difficulties which arise, for example, in the sphere of natural science, which led us to see that in many points the books of Scripture were not so clear and transparent as we had thought them to be. In this connection the encyclical *Divino Afflante* points out the great changes effected in the field of biblical studies since the time of Leo XIII. 'In fact, to speak only of one example, when our predecessor issues the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus,* very few places in Palestine had been the object of special excavations. Now these explorations have enormously increased in number and are carried out with a stricter scientific method, and with a skill perfected by experience, so that the results are now more copious and more certain. The experts, and all those who have joined in research, know how useful these investiga-

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[2] The first translation of this text, which appeared in the *Osservatore Romano,* had omitted the word *reapse,* 'in reality', which is, as we shall see, of decisive importance in this document.

[3] The encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII, cf. E.B. 120, deals fully with this case; with regard to Galileo Galilei cf. *Church,* no. 36.

tions have been for a more enlightened and thorough examination of holy scripture. The excavations were frequently made even more valuable by the discovery of written works which were of the greatest use in enabling us to learn about the languages, literature, history, customs and religious worship of ancient peoples. Equally significant has been the discovery, fairly frequent in recent times, of papyri which throw much light on our knowledge of public and private documents and institutions, especially those which go back to the time of Our Divine Saviour' (E.B. 546). One of the results of these numerous and varied discoveries has been the growth of a greater interest in differences of mentality, ways of thought and expression, which exist between us and the human authors of the holy Scriptures. For this reason the same encyclical also says: 'The literal sense of a written work is frequently not so obvious in the words of the ancient eastern writers as it is, for example, in the writings of our own time' (E.B. 558).

(2) Therefore, as it is so important to find out what the human authors really intended to say, it is clear that the indications offered us by the Constitution for the enquiry into the intentions of the authors is of fundamental importance. These indications are grouped for the most part under the heading 'literary forms': 'Those who seek to find the intention of the sacred writers must, among other things, take into consideration "literary forms"' (no. 12). It gives a brief account of what these 'literary' forms are: 'For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways, depending on whether a text is history of one kind or another, or whether its form is that of prophecy, poetry, or some other type of speech (*ibid.*). These last words show that the Constitution has no intention of giving a complete list of the various literary forms known, but is content to cite a few examples only.

Returning to its affirmation of the necessity of taking literary forms into consideration, the Constitution gives this reason: 'The interpreter must find out what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in his particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture' (*ibid.*). As we see, the Council does not consider literary forms in isolation, but as conditioned by 'particular circumstances' and in accordance with 'the situation of his own time and culture', that is, that of the sacred author. This placing of the literary forms in their own setting is extremely important, as we shall see later on. The way in which the Council proceeds to explain its thought shows how broadly it interprets the expression 'literary forms'. It continues: 'For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert,[4] due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the customs men normally followed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another' (*ibid.*).

(3) The best comment we can make on these considerations by the Council is to refer them to their natural context from which they have been taken, and which is mentioned in the Constitution itself, that is, the encyclical *Divino Afflante* of Pius XII, to whom must be given the credit for having made the notion and the study of literary forms an integral part of Catholic biblical research.

(a) Let us here forestall an obvious objection. It is said that the appeal to 'literary forms' has been frequently abused, and still is abused, and this is very true. We recall, for example, the classifications, often most minute, used by some representatives of 'form criticism', who discovered in the gospels certain 'doctrinal maxims', 'controversies', 'accounts of miracles' and various other literary forms, which seem more characteristic of Græco-hellenistic minds than of the semitic mentality. It is also certainly wrong to follow the example of some critics who, when they find themselves in any kind of difficulty, at once have recourse to a pseudo 'literary form'. And still more reprehensible are the tendentious classifications which, beginning with their choice of nomenclature, insinuate (if they do not actually assert) doubts about the historical accuracy of the gospel stories, as when they speak of 'legends'. But neither these excesses nor the wrong uses of this method, nor a certain hesitancy which, especially in the early stages, characterized these researches, are a sufficient reason for condemning this new approach out of hand. *Divino Afflante* knew of these abuses and excesses, and warned scholars to make '*prudent* use of this method' but added also that to neglect it would bring about grave harm to Catholic exegesis (E.B. 560).

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[4] Note that here we find once more the characteristic concept of 'assertion', seen in no. 11, where this concept was decisive in determining the meaning of biblical inerrancy. Here we understand the reason: this 'assertion' is to be identified with the 'intention of the sacred author', that is with what the sacred author actually means. Now it is clear that inerrancy can only refer to what the human author, and therefore the Holy Spirit, actually means, that is, what he 'asserts'.

(b) The same encyclical also offers us valuable advice as to how best to study these literary forms, and indicates the difficulty and delicacy of this research: 'What those ancient writers wished to express must be discovered not only by a study of the laws of grammar and philology and an examination of the whole context; the interpreter must also seek to understand those remote centuries in the East, and with the assistance of history, archeology, ethnology and other sciences, must succeed in discerning what literary forms were chosen by the writers of those far off times' (E.B. 560). The Pope then states what may now seem fairly obvious but which for many was not at all obvious at the time this document was published: 'In fact, the old eastern writers do not always express their ideas in the forms or ways which we use today, but in those which were commonly used by people of their own times and their own lands. The Bible scholar can only ascertain what these were by dint of a careful study of the ancient literature of the East. In recent years research in this field, conducted with greater care and diligence, but set in a clearer light the particular literary forms which were used in those ancient times in poetical compositions, in the setting forth of laws or principles of life, and in recounting historical events' (E.B. 558).

(c) The complex reality of these literary forms is most apparent when we consider what the encyclical itself says about the literary form of historical narrative, used in the ancient East. First of all the Pope asserts that recent historical and archeological research has 'also brilliantly demonstrated that among all the ancient people of the East the people of Israel occupy an eminent and extraordinary position in all that regards historical narrative, both for the antiquity of their records and their faithful account of events' (E.B. 558). Then the encyclical observes: 'Nevertheless, no one who has a right concept of biblical inspiration will be surprised to find that the sacred authors, like all ancient writers, had certain ways of explaining and narrating, certain idiomatic expressions, proper to semitic languages, and a certain use of generalization or hyperbole, sometimes even of paradoxical ways of expressing themselves, which serve to impress their meaning on the mind' (*ibid.*)[5]

(d) The encyclical then adds a theological evaluation of these ways of speaking and writing: 'Of all these ways of speaking, which ancient peoples, especially in the East, used to express their thoughts, none was excluded in the sacred books, provided that the literary form in use did not impair the holiness of God or the truth of the facts' (*ibid.*). The encyclical gives as a final reason the divine 'condescension' with which God speaks to men in human language, a subject we shall deal with later on when we are discussing paragraph no. 13 of the Constitution.

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[5] One example must suffice. Some authors have, for example, pointed out presumed contradictions between the gospels, as when in the accounts of two evangelists, as we read them today, the same thing is affirmed in one account and denied in another. For example, there is the well known admonition of Jesus when he exhorted his apostles, in their preaching missions, to observe total poverty, and trust in the providence of God. According to Matthew 10:10, and Luke 9:3; 10:4 the apostles are not to take with them a staff or sandals, which instead, according to Mark 6:8 et seq. they are permitted to take. In such a case the interpreter must try to find out the exact sense of the absolute prohibition, to see whether perhaps Mark assigns these words to Jesus according to what he believes to have been the master's intention (in fact Mark is using indirect speech!) whereas in St Luke's account the master had made use of hyperbole or paradox 'to impress his meaning more profoundly on their minds', being sure that they would not misunderstand him, for he himself, like the apostles, always wore sandals, according to the custom observed in Palestine. In other words, we find outselves faced here with a figure of speech, and so the apparent contradition is at once resolved. Cf. *The Study of the Synoptic Gospels*, Chapman, London 1966, p. 73.

(e) Finally, the encyclical emphasizes the urgency of the tasks awaiting biblical scholars in this field: 'Therefore the Catholic exegete, in order to satisfy the modern requirements of biblical studies, in expounding holy Scripture and showing it to be immune from error, is bound to make prudent use of this means. He must find out how much the particular style or literary form used by the sacred author may be of assistance in a correct and authentic interpretation, and he must be convinced that this aspect of his mission cannot be neglected without causing grave harm to Catholic exegesis' (E.B. 560). Further on the encyclical appeals also to the Catholic laity to co-operate in this important and sacred task (E.B. 561).

In conclusion, the same encylical shows the value of these studies in the defence of the inerrancy of Scripture: 'When certain critics presume to accuse the sacred authors of some historical error or inexactitude in reporting historical events, a closer examination of their accusations reveals that they are cavilling at those characteristic ways of describing events which ancient writers always used in their mutual exchange of ideas and which were considered quite legitimate in common use' (E.B. 560). But these studies do not merely resolve objections and difficulties: they also lead to 'a more complete and enlightened understanding of the sacred author's thought' (*ibid.*).

Scripture must be interpreted 'in the spirit' of God—the original author

Considering the complex origin and nature of the sacred books it is not surprising that their interpretation also is difficult and complex. Certainly it is most important to make every effort to understand what the inspired human author really meant, because God is speaking to us through his words. But this alone is not enough. We must also try to understand the meaning of the original author, the Holy Spirit. This necessity may at first seem surprising, because we have repeatedly said that God speaks to us through the inspired writer, and so when we have understood his meaning it would seem natural to suppose we have understood God's meaning too. But something is still lacking. God did not speak by the mouth of a single author, but by the mouths of many, scattered over almost a thousand years, the whole period to which the various books of the Old and New Testaments belong. Now if in the interpretation of human works it is an obvious and indisputable principle that in order fully to understand an author we must bear in mind the general context of all his work, it is clear that the same principle must be applied also to Scripture. Hence arises the question: how can we fully comprehend all that God wished to reveal to us in Scripture?

(1) The Constitution gives us the logical answer: just as it has already insisted that we must try to read every book of Scripture with the mind and in the spirit of its human author, so now it affirms that we must read and interpret every book—all Scripture, with the mind of the Holy Spirit who inspired it. This we know as the 'analogy of faith'.

The Constitution tells us how this must be done: 'But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account, along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith' (no. 12).

We see that this text consists of a premise and a conclusion. The premise states that 'Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written'. This thought and indeed almost all the words used here are taken from the encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus,* which in its turn was quoting from St Jerome. In explaining Jerome's doctrine, the encyclical insists that Scripture shall be read and understood 'in the same mind as the Holy Spirit, by which it was written'.[6] St Jerome, and consequently the encyclical too, speaks of the necessity of imploring the aid of the Holy Spirit, so that this Spirit may guide and assist us to grasp the meaning of Scripture. The Constitution is particularly emphatic upon this point. The conclusion enumerates the means we are to use in order to comprehend the entire meaning and intention of the primary author, that is: 'no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly interpreted. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith' (*ibid.*).

(2) We note that with regard to this subject the Constitution does not quote any earlier document of the *Magisterium* of the Church, as it did in preceding cases. We may however refer to the testimony of the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* which in part concerns our theme and which states that where the interpretation of a text has not been determined, either by the solemn or by the ordinary *Magisterium* of the Church, we must follow 'the general mind of the faith and adhere to this, as to a supreme rule for Catholic doctrine, such as we receive from the authority of the Church' (E.B. 109; cf. also no. 143; here it refers to the encyclical *Divino Afflante*, cf. E.B. 551). The same encyclical gives the reason for its assertion: 'As the same God is author both of the sacred books and of the doctrine deposited with the Church, it is certainly impossible for a legitimate interpretation to put forward a meaning of a Scriptural passage which is in any way contrary to the doctrine' (*ibid.*).

We have said that this testimony from *Providentissimus* concerns our subject 'in part'. In fact, it puts forward as a criterion the doctrine of the Church (which more or less corresponds to the 'living tradition' of our text) and of the analogy of faith, but does not speak of the content or unity of all Scripture. As far as we can judge, no earlier document of the *Magisterium* of the Church speaks of this criterion. But we may state that this principle of interpretation has in recent years become gradually strengthened among exegetes (including non-Catholics) although it had not been put forward in the documents of the *Magisterium* before this present Constitution.

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[6] E.B. 469; cf. also *De Imitatione Christi*, bk. I, chap. 5: 'Every part of Scripture is to be read in the same Spirit in which it was written.'

(3) The principle that the interpretation of Scripture requires a consideration of the content and unity of all Scripture is simply a conclusion drawn from the doctrine of the inspiration of the sacred books. If in fact all the books of the Old and New Testaments 'with all their parts' were 'written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit' (no. 11), it is obvious that Scripture is to be considered as a single Book endowed with a supernatural unity by its primary author the Spirit of God. Therefore, as a logical consequence, the only interpretation which is authentic and adequate is that which bears in mind this content and unity of Scripture.

The same conclusion is derived from a practical consideration of the way in which God revealed himself to men and over a long period of time inspired the various books of the Bible. In fact, all his revelations to men form a single whole, part of God's single and unified plan. The individual manifestations are episodes of a great epic poem. Every sacred author has his own episode and his own particular task, assigned to him by God. God chose many different authors in order to show men, through this diversity of persons, characters and situations, as much as he could of his infinite wealth. Every individual, that is every author, shows his own episode and has some knowledge of the general purpose. Only God has perfect knowledge of the whole, for he conceived it and arranged for its gradual realization in all its details. Only the Spirit of God, the primary author of all Scripture, understands the meaning of every episode and of every individual author: he chose them, trained and guided them while they were doing their part. So we understand how it was that he was able to infuse into these works, composed under his inspiration, some treasures which the authors themselves were unable to understand. He alone coordinated their individual contributions in the whole great epic. So it is clear that the study of the human authors of the individual books, of their mentality, culture, and ways of expressing themselves (all questions which are certainly of fundamental importance), cannot alone offer us the whole meaning of the primary author.

(4) In practice, the principle that we must take into consideration the content and unity of Holy Scripture means for the interpreter that when he explains, for example, an Old Testament book, he must bear in mind all the information he has gleaned from all the other earlier or later books of the Old Testament, and also all that he knows about the books of the New Testament. The same thing applies conversely in the interpretation of a New Testament book: here also the interpreter must bear in mind all the earlier or later books of the New Testament, and those of the Old too. And this is not merely or primarily in order to establish points of comparison with regard to the language used, or the concepts expressed, etc., it is above all in order to bear in mind what God in every one of these books, has revealed about himself. It is then a general rule of hermeneutics, as the art of interpretation applied to any human work, that a text must be studied in the light of similar texts or passages (cf. E.B. 550) and so we must say that from the point of view of the unity of Scripture it is natural to suppose that these similar or parallel texts may be found in all Scripture, independently of the date of composition of the individual book, and of the circumstances of the author, etc.[7] Later on the Constitution explains (no. 16) a special and significant application of this principle of the unity of Scripture, that is the principle formulated by St Augustine: the New Testament lies hidden in the Old Testament, and the Old becomes clear in the New.

(5) Having thus explained the principle of the unity of Scripture, we must draw the reader's attention to two points in the text we are studying. The first concerns the position held by this principle (in the Constitution) in the enquiry into the exact and full meaning of Scripture, as intended by God, the primary author.

A superficial reading of the document might lead one to suppose that here are mentioned three inter-connected principles: the unity of all Scripture and of its content, living tradition and the analogy of faith. However, when we look at the text more closely we see that it mentions only one principle, that of the unity of Scripture, while it adds that in using this criterion we must take into consideration also living tradition and the analogy of faith. It is easy to see the reasons behind this way of seeing the matter. The first and most obvious source for a profound and complete understanding of an author's text is in fact a knowledge of the whole of his work, which in the case in point means a knowledge of all Scripture.

Therefore Scripture itself, in its entirety, is its own best interpreter. Yet this is not the only criterion to guide us. We must of necessity add also living tradition and the analogy of faith. The reason for this is not hard to find. It is simply a further application of the same principle of interpreting the written word of God in the light of all we know about the intention of God, the primary author. Now we learn about this intention in the deposit of God's word entrusted to the Church, and this deposit consists of both tradition and Scripture (cf. no. 10). As we will and must interpret the books in the light of the whole intention of the Spirit which inspired them, we must necessarily take into account the whole of this deposit of faith, which means both tradition and the analogy of faith. Moreover it is a fact that although the Holy Spirit leads the believer into all truth by means of his inspired word, yet it enables him to understand this truth more fully, and makes the word itself more operative by means of tradition (cf. no. 8). It is therefore natural that, when we wish to have a thorough understanding of the meaning of the primary author of Scripture, we should take into consideration both tradition and the analogy of faith—which together form the deposit entrusted to the Church.[8]

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[7] We shall deal later on with the question of how the exegete is to decide whether in fact these passages are similar or parallel.

(6) An important question now arises: if we interpret the individual sacred books with the aid of such broad criteria—in the light of all Scripture, all tradition and all the deposit of faith—do we not run the risk of projecting into the text some thoughts which, although present in another part of Scripture or in the deposit of faith, are nevertheless alien to the text we are trying to interpret? Is there no danger that we may be working more with our imagination than with serious scientific intentions?

(a) This danger certainly exists. History offers us several examples of interpreters who, without taking pains to study the linguistic, historical and literary background, and after a summary glance at the text (probably a translation) rack their brains to discover certain profound meanings in it, or to prove dogmas of faith, etc. This sort of procedure has undoubtedly contributed

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[8] The professional exegete of today is often tempted to distrust tradition, as a criterion for the interpretation of Scripture. To be sure, the application of this criterion is delicate and implies certain difficulties in the way of a strict and serious scientific enquiry, difficulties that have not always been successfully solved. Let us try to explain how these may be overcome. We must now admit that this distrust often conceals some residue of individualism, and of its consequence, a sort of 'rationalism', which claims to investigate everything by its own efforts, refusing the help that might come from other men, and particularly from the various forms of 'tradition'. We must try therefore to consider objectively those true and authentic treasures contained in sacred tradition, which have been multiplied and still continue to multiply as it develops and pours its riches into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church (cf. no. 8). Therefore the encyclical *Divino Afflante* rightly affirms: 'It is sad that such precious treasures from early Christian times are barely known to a considerable number of modern writers, and that the students of the history of exegesis have not done all they could to study and rightly understand such an important question' (E.B. 554). The exegete must always remember and imitate the wise man described in Ecclesiasticus who ' . . . devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High'. He 'will seek out the wisdom of the ancients and will be concerned with prophecies; he will preserve the discourse of notable men and penetrate the subtleties of parables . . . ' (Eccli. 39:1-2). In order to find the wisdom of men of old the wise man 'will travel through the lands of foreign nations . . . ' (*ibid.*, v. 4). This is what the great men of early Christian times did—we mention two only: Irenaeus and Jerome.

considerably to discrediting the effort that must be made to use the criteria mentioned in the Constitution in order to arrive at an understanding of the primary author's intention.

(b) How can this danger be avoided? While we bear in mind the unity of Scripture and all its content, living tradition and the analogy of faith, let us not forget to devote just as much time to the study of the text and of the human author's intention, using to this end all the means mentioned in the Constitution (no. 12). In fact, all that other similar passages of Scripture, or living tradition and the analogy of faith, seem to suggest, must be checked by the text itself, and explained with all the means offered by linguistic, literary and historical research. The thoughts suggested by similar passages in Scripture, taking tradition and the analogy of faith also into consideration, may indeed constitute a greater and more extended development of the thought deduced from the text with the aid of linguistic, historical and literary research, or they may confer a richer meaning to the obvious meaning of the text, but they may never be completely extraneous to it. They must as a general rule fit into the same framework, that is, not exceed the power of expression of the words used by the sacred author.

(c) This is a somewhat delicate and complex question. Let us give first of all a practical example. The promise of a Saviour which God makes to our forefathers after their fall, a promise called the *Protevangelium* (Gen. 3:15), speaks of the victory of the 'woman' over the deceitful serpent: 'and the Lord God said to the serpent: . . . "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel" (Gen. 3:14-15, Douai version). Who is this woman? The Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* says: 'The books of the Old Testament recount the period of the history of salvation during which the coming of Christ into the world was being slowly prepared. These earliest documents, as they are read in the Church and understood in the light of a further and full revelation, set the figure of the woman, Mother of the Redeemer, in an ever clearer light. When looked at in this way, she is already prophetically foreshadowed in that victory over the serpent which was promised to our first parents after their fall into sin (cf. Gen. 3:15)' (no. 55). Therefore, while the simple linguistic-literary interpretation of Genesis 3:15 discovers in the text only the idea of the 'woman' who wins the victory over the serpent, in the light of later revelation, that is of the unity of Scripture, as in that of living tradition, it is clear that the reference intended by the primary author of this text was to the Blessed Virgin.

Let us add two further points. First of all it is well known that Catholic exegetes do not agree about the precise manner in which this text alludes to the Mother of the Redeemer. Some think that 'the woman' in the literal sense is Eve, who is however a type and image of Mary. Other exegetes think instead that the expression 'the woman' is an indeterminate expression and may indicate Eve, or women in general. In the light of the general content of Scripture and of living tradition it becomes clear that the text in its 'full' literal sense (a concept of which we shall speak later) refers to the Blessed Virgin.

(d) The second way of explaining in what sense the Blessed Virgin is foreshadowed in Genesis 3:15 offers an example of what in biblical hermeneutics (at least in Catholic schools) is called the 'full' sense of Holy Scripture. This means a sense which, although latent in the text and intended by the primary author, is nevertheless one which the human author did not fully understand, or did not even perceive. St Thomas Aquinas, like modern theologians, taught that even the true prophets did not know all that the Holy Spirit wished to express through their visions and their words. In this sense the sacred authors were inadequate instruments of the Holy Spirit (cf. St Thomas 2, 2a, 173, art. 4). This is probably what a passage in *Providentissimus* is alluding to: 'In the case of books written by the Holy Spirit, many things lie hidden in the words which far exceed the power and scope of human reason; there are the divine mysteries, and many other things are contained in them, sometimes moreover with a far wider and more mysterious meaning than the words seem to indicate, or the laws of hermeneutics suggest. . . .'[9]

(7) As we see, this is a very complicated and delicate point concerning the interpretation of Scripture to which it has only been possible to refer briefly in our commentary. However, this difficulty of the interpreter's task must not alarm him unduly or cause him to doubt the validity of the principles of interpretation laid down by the Council. They are a logical consequence of the doctrine of inspiration and are deduced from sacred tradition itself. And, after all, as every scientific study is faced with similar difficulties it is not surprising that they occur in the interpretation of a book of which God himself is the primary author! Certainly the exact application of these principles is not easy for it requires great and laborious care. The Constitution first of all strongly emphasized the necessity of studying with every means what the human author intended to say, and then insisted that the same effort should be made to consider also the content of all Scripture and its unity, together with the living tradition and the analogy of faith. Only by so doing shall we be able to give a wise and profound interpretation of God's word. The task is not easy but the divine gift, the word written by God himself, well deserves all our effort, and we are concerned with the supreme religious interests of all mankind.

Concerning the difficulties of interpretation the encyclical *Divino Afflante* notes that 'In the sacred books which he inspired, God wished some difficulties to occur here and there, so that we might feel impelled to read and examine them with greater care and also, that by thus realizing our own limitations, we might find therein a wholesome exercise in humility' (E.B. 563). Then it adds, very significantly: 'It would not be surprising, however, if we were never able to find a fully satisfactory answer to some of these problems, because we are often dealing with obscure questions, very remote from our own times and our own experience and also because exegesis, like other serious branches of study, may have its own secrets which are hidden from our minds and sealed against all human endeavour (*ibid.*).

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[9] E.B. 108; concerning the 'full meaning' cf. Brown, R. E., *The 'Sensus Plenior' of Sacred Scripture*, Baltimore, 1965.

The important task of exegetes

The concluding words of the paragraph we are now explaining prove that in its indications on the interpretation of Scripture the Council was rightly thinking first and foremost of the work of exegetes. In fact, after having spoken of interpretation, the Constitution proceeds to say: 'It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all that has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God' (no. 12).

This brief description of the essential task of interpreters of Scripture is of the greatest importance. It is the first time that a Council has dealt with this subject in an authoritative way, first expounding the essential principles of biblical interpretation. It would have been impossible in so few words to say greater things about the exegete's task. His work is here grafted on to that profound and essential process which the Constitution has described as the development of sacred tradition, through which 'there is a growth in the understanding of the truths and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study of believers, who treasure these things in their hearts . . .' (no. 8). And so tradition makes the sacred writings themselves 'more profoundly understood' (*ibid.*).

(1) It is well known that the encyclical *Divino Afflante* was full of praise for the general contribution made by Catholic exegetes to an ever growing understand of Scripture. When it speaks of biblical scholars the document says: 'many of these, in their written works also, have in various ways promoted, and are still promoting biblical research, sometimes by publishing the sacred texts according to the principles of true criticism, or by explaining and illustrating them, or translating them into modern languages; they also recommend them to the faithful for devout reading and meditation, and finally they also make use of any other scientific research which may lead to a better understanding of the divine books' (E.B. 545).

(2) The Constitution nevertheless particularly insists upon the function of the exegete with regard to the *Magisterium* of the Church, saying that he furnishes the 'preparatory study, by which the judgment of the Church may mature'. It immediately adds the reason why this work does not in itself provide a definitive judgment, but rather serves to prepare the judgment of the Church: 'For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission of guarding and interpreting the word of God' (no. 12). This statement merely repeats the truth which the Constitution has already expounded, that is, that 'the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church' (no. 10).

Therefore, if the work of the exegete is not an end in itself, it is nevertheless truly a preparation of the judgment of the Church. It is interesting to notice that Leo XIII, ahead of his time in this question as in so many others, explicitly stated this in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*. Speaking of the tasks of the Catholic exegete he says: 'A great field is now open in which every scholar may with confidence exercise his talent as an interpreter in the service of the Church. In certain passages of the divine books, for which a certain and final interpretation is still to be sought, it may be that God in his providence will use him, if he is fully trained by assiduous study, to mature the judgment of the Church.'[10] The reason for this is clear. Although the sacred hierarchy is assisted by the Holy Spirit the bishops do not receive any new public revelation pertaining to the divine deposit of faith (cf. *Church,* no. 25). But they are responsible for all necessary research: 'The Roman Pontiff and the bishops, in view of their office and of the importance of the matter, strive painstakingly and by appropriate means to enquire earnestly into that revelation and to give suitable expression to its contents' (*ibid.*). This is where the work of the exegete comes in.

All who have followed the history of biblical research in recent years, and the teachings of the *Magisterium* of the Church, know how much certain questions (for example, in the encyclical *Divino Afflante*—inspiration, literary forms, etc.) have been prepared by the diligent research of Catholic exegetes, united in complete harmony with the *Magisterium.* In this way the results of the labours of the exegetes have first been apparent in the less solemn documents of the *Magisterium,* such as the encyclicals; today some of these results form part of the solemn conciliar doctrine of the Church. All this collaboration of the exegetes with the hierarchy is but a particular illustration of St Paul's general teaching on the diversity of the gifts which God distributes among various members, so that each in his own way may contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ, which is the Church (cf. Eph. 4:11-16; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-30).

Let us conclude with two considerations, both derived from the close connection between the doctrine of the divine inspiration of Scripture and the manner in which it must be interpreted. We have shown that an adequate interpretation of Scripture must as far as possible—using all the means at our disposal—be based on the intention of the human author of

each book, and also that it must seek to expound Scripture 'in the Spirit' of the primary author. For an intimate understanding of the human author one not only may but must apply and use all the methods of critical, historical and literary interpretation. The attempt to understand the primary author requires not only that the exegete should bear in mind the inviolable sanctity and truth of God, and therefore the inerrancy of Scripture, but above all the whole intention of the divine author himself, and therefore the content and unity of all Holy Scripture. In this way and, we may add, in this way alone, can be reconciled the two requirements which today seem to many to be contradictory: the processes of critical and historical research are to be used in the study of Scripture, without however seeking to cast doubts upon the inspired character of these writings or suggesting any compromise. In fact in this way—bearing in mind also the content and unity of all Scripture, living tradition and the analogy of faith—we succeed in giving a full and exact interpretation of the written word of God, that is, we succeed in discerning clearly and in its entirety the meaning of the primary author, God himself.

The second thought is suggested by the concluding consideration of this chapter in the Constitution, in which it compares the mystery of the inspiration of Scripture with that of the Incarnation of the Word: 'For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human speech, just as of old the Word of the eternal Father, when he put on weak human flesh, became like other men' (no. 13). This comparison enables us more fully to understand the complex principles which govern the interpretation of Scripture. Indeed, just as we know the Incarnate Word, and the Father himself, only by seeing and knowing Christ, according to the words of Jesus to Philip: 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9), so we are able to know the thought and the eternal words of God only by studying with all available means the words of the sacred author. On the other hand, however, we can understand the mystery of Christ only in the context of the whole history of salvation, which he 'completes' (cf. no. 4) and which shines in all its profound truth in him, 'the fulness of all revelation' (no. 2). In the same way also the profound and full intention of the written word of God may be understood only in the light of the content of all Scripture, as it is even more clearly brought to light by living tradition and in harmony with the analogy of faith, in the framework of the whole deposit which has been entrusted to the Church.

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[10] E.B. 109: This idea that the Catholic interpreter collaborates in 'preparing the judgment of the Church' is already expressed in an instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (cf. *Act. Ap. Sed.* 56, 1964, p. 716). The wording of the Constitution is taken straight from Leo XIII: '*ut quasi praeparato studio, judicium Ecclesiae maturetur*'. It is interesting to note that in spite of this the Constitution does not refer to Leo XIII.

9 | The Old Testament

The theme which the Constitution now considers is essential, not only because it forms part of the general plan of divine Revelation, but also because it is of vital importance to every Christian. In spite of this, some Christians have considerable difficulty in accepting it and suffer from grave doubts.[1]

Sometimes Christians ask whether, since the books of the Old Testament describe only the election and history of the people of Israel, they have any significance for us, apart from their undoubted historical interest. Even if it is true that the theme of the Old Testament is also the preparation and prophetic announcement of Christ the Redeemer and of the Messiah's reign, all this does not seem to be other than a historical record which has no actual and vital connection with the reality of Christ and his New Covenant. And finally the fundamental question arises: what, in general, is the connection between the Old and the New Testaments?

In its treatment of these questions the Constitution returns to the points it had expounded in no. 3, when dealing with the history of salvation in the Old Testament, but now it treats them from the point of view of the books themselves, in order to bring out their special significance.

The emphasis is therefore on the meaning of the individual books. Obviously a Council document cannot deal with all the relevant questions, but must necessarily confine itself to those which are essential. That is why this chapter in the Constitution, although it deals with such a vast and urgent problem, is very short, in fact, the shortest of all. In order to answer the essential points of enquiry the chapter proceeds to explain, step by step, the importance and significance of the books of the Old Testament, from the point of view of the divine plan for man's salvation.

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[1] There are also those who, influenced perhaps by historical-critical study of the Old Testament books ask what interest there can be for us in the religious writings of the people of Israel, and why they should be considered of fundamental importance for the building of our Christian life. They ask why these writings—certainly valuable in themselves—should be preferred to so many other religious books, for example to the religious writings of India or China, which also excel in literary beauty and profundity of thought. The general answer to these questions has indeed already been given in chapter 8: the Old Testament Books were inspired by God, who is their 'literary' author, and they describe God's revelation.

The scheme of the chapter is quite simple. First of all, it considers the general plan of the Old Testament with regard to Israel, and from this point of view the importance for Christians of the Old Testament books (no. 14); then it deals with the purpose of the Old Testament, shown to be that of preparing and directly foretelling Christ and his Kingdom, and here we see the importance for Christians of these sacred Old Testament writings (no. 15); finally, it considers the mutual relationship between the Old and New Testaments (no. 16).[2]

The Old Testament is of permanent value

The Constitution naturally begins with the most obvious significance of the Old Testament: it first considers Israel as the means chosen to prepare the salvation of mankind. So first of all it explains the election and special mission of Israel; then it shows how the books of the Old Testament which relate the history of Israel, are of permanent value and therefore of value also to Christians.

(1) Concerning the election of Israel and the mission assigned to her by God in preparing man's salvation, the Constitution begins by stating God's purpose in electing this people: 'The God of supreme love, by a special dispensation, chose for himself a people to whom he might entrust his promises' (no. 14). Then it proceeds, step by step, to illustrate the fulfilment of this plan, and brings out the two principles: the two Covenants, the protagonists Abraham, Moses and the prophets, and finally the immediate and final aims of the whole divine purpose: 'He entered into a Covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:18) and, through Moses, with the people of Israel (cf. Ex. 24:8). To this people which he had acquired for himself, he so manifested himself through words and deeds as the one true and living God that Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men, and with God himself speaking to them through the mouth of the prophets, Israel daily gained a deeper and closer understanding of his ways and made them more widely known among the nations (cf. Psalm 21:28-29; 95 [96]:1-3; Is. 2:1-4; Jer. 3:17)' (no. 14).

(a) Let us briefly indicate certain important points in this text. We have already explained (cf. chap. 3) with regard to the election of one particular race, that this idea does not imply a kind of racialism which intends to exalt one people above all others; election is a free gift from God and implies no merit on the part of the chosen people but only his free decision. Nor does it mean that God loves only the people he has chosen and cares for the welfare of this race alone. On the contrary, election means the beginning of God's more intense and particular effort to prepare the salvation of all mankind. The Constitution says this in so many words: God chose a particular people because in his great love he was 'planning and preparing the salvation of the whole human race' (no. 14).

The fact that God, in order to bring about men's salvation, chose not an individual but a people, shows what might be called the social aspect of salvation. This aspect is explicitly expressed in the *Constitution on the Church*: 'At all times and among every people, God has welcomed whoever fears him and does what is right (cf. Acts 10:35). It has pleased God, however, to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves him in holiness' (no. 9; cf. also *Missions*, no. 2 and above, chap. 2, note 4). The election of Israel is the consequence of this plan.

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[2] As we often have to use in this chapter the technical expression 'the plan of salvation' we refer the reader to the explanation we have already given in chapter 2, note 5. In this connection cf. also 'Our common heritage: the Old Testament as a bridge' in Bea, '*Way to Unity after the Council*', Chapman, London, 1967; '*The Church and the Jewish People*', 1966, chap. 2: 'The Unity of the human family'; chap. 3: 'The election of Israel and the Origins of the Church'; chap. 7: 'Life and Action'.

(b) We have already sufficiently explained the fulfilment of the divine plan in our commentary on no. 3 of the Constitution, where we have demonstrated, with quotations from the New Testament, that Christ and the apostles thought of the whole history of Israel as a special divine plan to prepare for the salvation wrought by Christ. Let us add a few words here about the means used by God to prepare and train Israel for her mission: 'To this people which he had acquired for himself, he so manifested himself through words and deeds as the one true and living God that Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men, and with God himself speaking to them through the mouth of the prophets, Israel gradually gained a deeper and clearer understanding of his ways' (no. 14). No. 3 of the Constitution had more fully explained the nature of these 'ways of God with men', which Israel learnt from experience, saying that God taught the people, so that they might 'acknowledge him as the one living and true God, a provident Father and just Judge'. Let us note also that this was not a question of purely intellectual knowledge, but of the training of a whole people; Israel was 'to know by experience' how to behave with God or rather, as the *Constitution on the Church* says, God gradually 'taught this people by manifesting in its history both himself and his purpose, and by making it holy unto himself' (no. 9).

(c) It is above all essential to point out the universality of God's aims in all his work with the Israelites, which was entirely directed towards the preparation of the salvation of all men. When we commented upon no. 3 of the Constitution we showed that the whole history of Israel, from the first calling of Abraham, was directed to this purpose.[3] We also showed that while God was preparing the Israelites for this divine purpose he was over mindful of other peoples, and gradually accustomed Israel herself to the thought that he is the God and Father of all peoples and cares for all. Indeed, Israel herself was to co-operate ever more closely with God in this universal purpose to make him 'more widely known among the nations' (no. 14).[4]

(2) All who have carefully studied the Constitution's explanation of the meaning and essential function of the election, training and mission of Israel have already perceived that the plan of the Old Testament, and therefore the contents of all its inspired books, are of essential importance for all Christians and for the Church, and the reason for this is already fairly clear. Therefore the Constitution goes on to speak of the individual books of the Old Testament: 'The plan of salvation, foretold by the sacred authors, recounted and explained by them, is found as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament; therefore these books, written under divine inspiration, remain of permanent value' (no. 14). This statement is quite clear: the premise states that the plan of salvation is found as the true word of God in the inspired books of the Old Testament, and the obvious corollary is that the books are of permanent value.[5]

(a) The reasons for these affirmations in the Constitution may be given in more detail.

Let us take first the affirmation that in the Old Testament we find foretold, recounted and explained, the plan of salvation. We saw that this was true when we were commenting upon no. 3 of the Constitution and we showed that Christ and his apostles considered the books of the Old Testament primarily as the expression of the plan of the Old Testament, and as preparation for the plan of the New. That these books were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and are therefore truly the word of God, we have seen stated in the preceding chapter of the Constitution (no. 11). These two facts mean that the books must of necessity be of permanent value, not only because they are divinely inspired but also because the purpose of the Old Testament is an essential part of that single process of the revelation of God to mankind which is called the 'history of salvation' (nos. 2-4).

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[3] Cf. chap. 3, p. 71.

[4] We have already spoken of the Old Testament texts quoted in the Constitution, and added various other references, cf. above, chap. 3, pp. 73 ff.

[5] Pius XI, in his encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*, spoke of the permanent value of the Old Testament when he opposed the anti-Semitic theories of the National Socialists in Germany (cf. *Act. Ap. Sed.* 29, 1937, pp. 150 f.).

(b) The Constitution is not content with stating in general terms the permanent value of the Old Testament writings, a value which might be merely of historical interest. Using the words of St Paul, it specifies that these books are all written for our instruction and training. This is confirmed by a quotation from St Paul's letter to the Romans in which he exhorts the 'strong' to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please themselves. He gives as his reason, the behaviour of Christ himself who 'did not please himself', for it had been written: 'the insults of those who insult thee fall on me' (cf. Rom. 15:1-3). This quotation from Psalm 67 (68) offers the apostle an opportunity to state the general principle of the importance of Holy Scripture (in this context he meant the Old Testament) for the Christian: 'For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (*ibid.* no. 4). We might add, as further confirmation, a text we have already seen—in another context—in the preceding chapter: 'All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness' (II Tim. 3:16-17). Here we see what great significance is attributed to the books of the Old Testament. This last quotation shows that the 'training' referred to was not merely intellectual instruction but a general training in justice and righteousness. Scripture is the means by which the 'man of God' that is, the apostle, is trained and, in his turn, trains the faithful.

The Old Testament foretells the coming of Christ

The general affirmation of the permanent value of the books of the Old Testament naturally needs some elucidation. The Constitution now indicates (1) the principal aim of the Old Testament, which is to announce and prepare for the coming of Christ and of his Kingdom and, answering those difficulties mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, which arose from the imperfect and provisional character of the Old Testament, also states (2) that the main religious principles of the Old Testament are not invalidated by the provisional character of the plan of the Old Covenant. Both these indications are extremely valuable and significant for the Christian's practical life.

First of all, the principal aim of the Old Testament, that of announcing and preparing for the coming of Christ and of his Kingdom: 'The principal purpose to which the plan of the Old Covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the universal Redeemer, and of the Messianic Kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy (cf. Luke 24:44; John 5:39; I Peter 10), and to indicate its meaning by means of various types (cf. I Cor. 10:11)' (no. 15; cf. also *Church,* no. 55).

(1) The general idea that the plan of the Old Testament was chiefly directed towards preparing in various ways the coming of Christ and of his Kingdom offers no particular difficulties. We have already seen Christ's attitude and that of his apostles to the sacred writings. To prove his divine mission Christ, in his discussions with the scribes and pharisees, appeals to the testimony of the Old Testament (cf. John 5:39, 46; Luke 4:18, 21; Matt. 11:10; Matt. 3:1; Matt. 17:11-13; Matt. 21:16; 22:41-46; 23:39; 26:64; Mark 14:62). Moreover, in order to prepare his apostles for the 'scandal' of his passion and cross, and to console them after the disillusionment caused by the manner of his death, Christ refers to what had been written about him in the Scriptures (cf. Matt. 26:24, 31; Mark 9:12; 14:21, 27; Luke 18:31-32; 9:22, 45 before the passion, and Mark 24:25-27, 44-47 after the passion). In fact Christ seems anxious that all that had been written about him should be fulfilled (Matt. 26:31, 54; Mark 14:27; Luke 4:21; 24:44; John 17:12; 19:28 etc.).

The apostles are equally convinced of the truth of the sacred books. St Peter says repeatedly to the Jews: '... all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days' (Acts 3:22, 24); 'to him all the prophets bear witness...' (Acts 10:43; cf. I Peter 1:10); concerning what the leaders of the Jews did 'in ignorance', Peter also said that God had fulfilled what he had 'foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer' (Acts 3:17-18). St Paul said that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders 'because they did not recognize him (Christ) nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him... and we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children...' (Acts 13:27, 32-33).

(2) In fact, this is the strongest argument used by the apostles to explain the 'stumbling block' of the Cross (cf. I Cor. 1:23): the condemnation and death of Jesus which at first sight seemed to belie the dignity and messianic mission of Christ. In fact, the apostles are not content to put forward the merely empirical and historical cause of the crucifixion, that is, the behaviour of the leaders of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:13, 15; 4:27; 5:30; 10:39; 13:28). Going over to the offensive they show that indeed those painful events themselves constitute the final proof that in Christ was fulfilled what God had foretold by the mouth of the prophets, (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28; 13:27; I Cor. 15:3) and conclude that therefore Christ is the Messiah foretold by the prophets. Now this argument, used especially in speaking to the Jews, shows that the apostles and their audiences were convinced that in the Old Testament God had foretold a Messiah. As the force of the apostles' announcement lay in their declaration to the people of Israel that for them it was a question of life and death, and that in Christ lay their great hope, it follows that the announcement of the Messiah and of his Kingdom was the great and central promise of the Old Testament.

(3) That this Messiah and his Kingdom meant a Redeemer of the whole world and a universal Kingdom, including all mankind, is obvious from what we have already said; the development of divine revelation in the Old Testament shows ever more clearly that God's purpose embraced all the peoples of the earth.

The Constitution has no need at this point to draw the obvious conclusion that because of this prediction of Christ the Redeemer and of his Kingdom the Old Testament is of permanent value for Christians. Naturally, if the central theme both of the general plan and of the individual books of the Old Testament is gradually to predict and prepare for Christ the Redeemer and his Kingdom, then the Old Testament's permanent value and significance, like that of Christ himself and his Kingdom, are obvious. In fact, at the close of the paragraph we are now explaining, the Constitution states, as one of the reasons why we must treat these books with reverence, the fact that in them 'is concealed the mystery of our salvation'.

The knowledge of God and of man

The Constitution now proceeds to indicate the importance of the individual books of the Old Testament and the attitude of the Christian towards them. It begins with a general principle: 'Now the books of the Old Testament, in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men' (no. 15). In saying this the Constitution implicitly accepts the necessary limitations of Old Testament revelation which constitutes a manifestation of God only 'in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ'. At the same time, however, it affirms the religious values which, in spite of these limitations, are contained in the sacred books of the Old Testament: 'These books, although they also contain some things which are incomplete and temporary, nevertheless show us true divine pedagogy' (*ibid.*).

Therefore the document says that these books are to be received and used with 'reverence' because of the essential truths which the Old Testament can offer to all Christians: 'These same books, then, express a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about him, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence' (*ibid.*).

(1) First of all the Constitution frankly admits that there is some truth in the objection we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that is, that there must evidently be some limitations to what the Old Testament can offer us, because of the conditions which prevailed before salvation was brought by Christ, in whom the revelation of the Old Testament was made manifest to all men. Concequently, it cannot be denied that Old Testament writings contain some 'incomplete and temporary things' (no. 15). Let us give an example from the so-called ritual law, that is, the special forms of worship described in the Old Testament, which include also the rules for 'ritualistic' or 'levitical' purity, rules which, enriched and amplified also by tradition after the Old Testament era are sometimes referred to even in the New Testament. In this connection we recall St Paul's struggle against the tendencies of those Jews who wished to impose upon the 'gentile Christians' (the Christians who had come to Christianity from paganism) the observance of Hebrew ritual regulations. It was necessary for the apostolic Council of Jerusalem to oppose these tendencies, and to declare that these rules were not to be imposed upon 'gentile Christians' (cf. Acts 15:1-29, 23-29). There is an instance of 'incomplete' things in the sermon on the mount, when Christ, using the well known phrase: 'You have heard that it was said to the men of old . . . but I say to you . . .' pronounces his own doctrine, not only in opposition to the later Hebrew traditions, but also to the imperfect laws of the Old Testament. Here he is putting forward, in opposition to the Old Testament, the nobler conception of a man's duty required by the Kingdom of God, which far surpasses the justice of the scribes and pharisees (cf. Matt. 5:20-48). We recall also, among many other examples, the way in which Christ abolished the 'certificate of divorce' in use among the Jews: 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery' (Matt. 19:8-9).[6]

(2) The acknowledgment of Old Testament limitations does not however prevent our Constitution from fully recognizing its great religious significance. These Books 'reveal to all men the knowledge of God', 'contain a store of sublime teachings about God', reveal also the 'knowledge of man' and 'sound wisdom about human life' (no. 15). They also show God's just and merciful dealings with men (*ibid.* cf. no. 2), teaching us to see God as a 'provident Father and wise Judge'. The contain also a 'wonderful treasury of prayers' and finally, 'in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way (*ibid.*).[7]

(a) First of all the document speaks of the knowledge of God and of his dealings with men. The Old Testament teaches us a great deal about God and his attributes—his omniscience, omnipotence, justice, providence, etc. In the New Testament this doctrine is not so much explained as presupposed and applied; and yet it is indispensable also to an understanding of God's dealings with men under the New Covenant, and especially to an understanding of Christ and his mission.

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[6] This last example reminds us that temporal conditions, before Christ brought salvation to man, were marked by primitive and crude customs, so that some descriptions in the Old Testament may easily be a stumbling block to people who are simple, innocent or insufficiently instructed, and so are astonished to find such things in the divine Book. That is why the Church, in her motherly care for weaker souls (cf. Rom. 15:1-3) has always taken pains to explain these things to the faithful, pointing out that God reveals himself according to the actual conditions of a particular period, and tolerates these customs in order to make men understand their own weakness and sin, their need of redemption and of the help God freely offers them, etc. But since these explanations, especially in earlier times and among simple and uneducated people were at times insufficient, the Church has now provided special editions of the books of the Old Testament, in which certain crudities are omitted. This is a precaution taken out of regard for her beloved children, in order that Scripture, which is given us for our good, may not become a stumbling block for the uninstructed.

[7] Some readers will think that all these points are to be found, and in a more perfect and sublime form, in the New Testament. Let us say at once that this is frequently not the case. We shall show this in more detail later on.

Moreover, the books of the Old Testament gives us a more profound explanation of history, even offering us its theological explanation, and, above all, they recount the history of salvation. They show God's dealings with men in the past, beginning with creation and man's fall into sin, and then through the long preparation of salvation until the time came when the Kingdom of God was restored through Christ. They teach us also how this Kingdom of God is gradually proceeding towards its fulfilment. In this way the Old Testament offers us essential wisdom both for the earthly and for the eternal life of every individual man, and of the Church herself.

(b) Another important contribution which the Old Testament books make to the life of the Christian is the knowledge of man and of his relations with God and with his neighbour, that is, all that is expressed in the words of the Constitution: 'sound wisdom about human life' (no. 15). For example, these books show us what the slow preparation of the Kingdom of God and the salvation which it brings to them, require of men; man is required to offer complete submission to God, based upon faith, and a life which expresses this submission. Naturally, the New Testament also proclaims these requirements, but in doing so, it bases its teaching very largely on the Old Testament, to which it appeals, or it briefly recalls its teachings in order to add to them the new requirements of the Kingdom of God, which far surpass the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees (cf. Matt. 5:20), obviously without ever abolishing the moral duties proclaimed by the Old Testament.

The best example of this is seen in St Paul's well known doctrine that love is the fulfilment of the law, because he says 'he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. The Commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet", and any other

commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself".' Although the so-called ritual laws of the Old Testament have been set aside, this abrogation by no means signifies the abolition of the moral and religious duties which they proclaimed, nor does it encourage lawless anarchy. God sent his own Son to atone for sin, and 'condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Rom. 8:3, 4). By the power of the gift of the Holy Spirit the Christian behaves 'according to the Spirit' and so is no longer, as St Paul says, a slave to the law, but has been freed from it by Christ in order to live in the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:22, 23). This does not mean that he need not obey the law, but that, by the power of the gift of the Holy Spirit he has received the 'new heart' foretold by the prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 36:26; cf. Jer. 24:7) so that from now onwards he observes and fulfils the law of God, not under compulsion as a slave, but of his free will.

(c) The 'sound wisdom for human life' offered in the Old Testament books enables us also to understand and to overcome crises and calamities. It shows us that these occurrences are part of the inevitable struggle and suffering which lead us to the slow realization and revelation of the perfection of the Kingdom of God at the end of time. The few and brief indications of this contained in the gospels and in the apostolic writings (apart from the Book of Revelation) are incomprehensible without the light which streams from the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The only true prophetic book of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation, shows us, in the way in which it sees and interprets such happenings, that this meaning must be sought in the writings of the Old Testament, and teaches us how to find this meaning. The 'Apocalypse' is indeed all interwoven with quotations from the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

But the knowledge we derive from the Old Testament is not all purely theoretical. Perhaps it would never be possible fully to understand either Christianity itself or the sufferings and hardships of life without the interpretation which we find, for example, in the Book of Job, or of Tobit, or in so many of the Psalms. It is the Old Testament which teaches us about the fatherly and all powerful providence of God who watches over the life and prosperity of those who faithfully serve him (cf. Job 12:13), so that St Paul can say: 'We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him' (Rom. 8:28).

A 'divine pedagogy' in use in the Church

We must nevertheless emphasise the fact that what God gives us in the books of the Old Testament does not consist merely of purely intellectual knowledge. In fact these books 'show us true divine pedagogy' (no. 15). God had not only 'trained' the chosen race (cf. no. 3) but had revealed himself to them as 'the one true and living God' so that 'Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men' (no. 14). All the pages of the Old Testament show us how living and profound is this knowledge of God revealed to individuals as to peoples. They truly express, even now, a 'lively sense of God' (no. 15). The best example of this profound conclusion is found in the use which the Church makes of the books of the Old Testament, and the place occupied by this 'divine pedagogy' in the sacred Liturgy. Here we have also a valid confirmation of what the Constitution tells us about the great religious truths contained in these books, truths which are of vital importance for the Church.

(1) The Church, conscious of the great value of this knowledge of God, has from the earliest times of Christianity made abundant use of the Old Testament books in her liturgy, in preaching and in various other ways. The Old Testament has become an essential part of her liturgical literature. The Book of Psalms is the supreme prayer book by means of which and in which the Christian community turns to God. Just as Christ and his apostles, in the various circumstances of their lives, prayed in the psalmist's words, so the Church and the faithful do today. In fact, the situation of the Church and her members largely corresponds to that of the authors of the Psalms, and to that of Old Testament communities in general: they also appear before their God as poor creatures, in need of his help, totally dependent upon him, suffering and persecuted; they also turn to him as sinful men who have been pardoned and saved. In this way Christians also experience in their own lives the same intimate sense of God which characterizes these books; they learn of God's purpose and the way in which God, just and merciful, deals with men, and they grow to understand God better, not only from the books of the New Testament but also, and in an unforgettable way, from those of the Old Testament. These books, especially those written with a didactic purpose, also teach Christians, as once they taught (and still teach) the Jewish people, true wisdom about human life. By her use of the Psalms the Church has from her earliest times sanctified every hour of the day, praising and adoring in the Holy Spirit God who is the primary author of these prayers.

(2) The Church also uses the Old Testament to reveal to her children, ever more clearly, the mystery of salvation; and to prepare them to receive Christ, their Saviour, into their lives. Think, for example, of the lessons from the prophet Isaiah with which the Church prepares in Advent for the feast of the Nativity; think of the lessons from the Old Testament which she uses for the instruction of her children during Lent, and particularly of those taken from Jeremiah and Isaiah, in which she speaks to the faithful of the passion of Christ. This use of the Old Testament is made possible by the fact that we Christians, although believing that Christ has already come and already played his part in the work of Redemption, know also that we have to co-operate with Christ in the ever more perfect realization of the Kingdom of God in ourselves; moreover, we believe also in the final glorious coming of Christ and long for this, so that we live 'awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus

Christ' (Tit. 2:13). In this sense just as the Spirit and the Bride say: 'Come' so we also pray: 'Come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:17, 20). This desire of ours, and this long and assiduous preparation for the glorious coming of Jesus, find a most fitting expression and encouragement in the books of the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and in the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

(3) There are perhaps still more profound reasons for the influence which the books of the Old Testament exercise over the life of the Christian. Apart from the pauline doctrine on the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, a doctrine which provides the final answer to our problem and of which we shall speak further on, we shall here refer to only one such reason. Everyone who comes to Christ and through him becomes a share in the Kingdom of God must in some way or other follow the same road by which God has led mankind, and in a particular sense the people of Israel, the same road along which the preaching apostles led the first Christian communities to an understanding of the mission of Christ. This road is to a great extent mapped out and explained in the books of the Old Testament. In fact, in order to receive the supernatural gifts brought us by Christ, man must first of all have a certain knowledge of God, his Creator, his provident and merciful Father but also his just Judge; he must also become aware of his duties to God, of the gravity of sin and of his own sins in particular. These are all things, as we have already said, which are amply explained in the Old Testament, whereas in the New Testament they are barely mentioned, summarized, or merely taken for granted.

The New Testament is hidden in the Old: the Old is made manifest in the New.

The profound sense of the meaning and importance of the Old Testament for the Christian induces the Council to explain a further question: the mutual relationship of the books of the Old and New Testaments. This is an important problem, not only for the interpretation of Scripture by specialists and preachers, but also for its reading and use by the faithful.

The Constitution, in tackling this question, takes as its starting point the last words of the preceding paragraph, which state that in the books of the Old Testament is 'hidden the mystery of our salvation' (No. 15). Therefore the document goes on to say: 'God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old, and the Old be made manifest in the New' (no. 16). This affirmation about the New Testament being hidden in the Old is a conclusion drawn from the preceding affirmation (no. 15) that in the books of the Old Testament is hidden the mystery of our salvation. Therefore the Constitution proceeds to explain in what sense the Old becomes manifest in the New, saying: 'For, though Christ established the New Covenant in his Blood (cf. Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25), nevertheless the books of the Old Testament with all their parts, caught up into the proclamation of the gospel, acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27; Rom. 16:25-26; II Cor. 3:14-16)' (*ibid.*).

(1) This passage is somewhat complicated. Anyone who might have thought that with the conclusion of the New Covenant by Christ all that the Old Testament contained was thereby abrogated is warned by the Council that this is not so: the books of the Old Testament have been absorbed into the preaching of the gospel. In fact, this preaching explains and illustrates their full meaning. Consequently, the writings of the Old Testament become clear, not only in the light of the plan of salvation revealed in the New Testament, that is, in the light of the events which brought to fulfilment what had been prophetically foretold in the Old, but also in the light of the preaching of Christ and his apostles, that is, in the actual writings of the New Testament (cf. no. 8).

The Constitution concludes by returning to its first consideration, that is, that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and adds that the writings of the Old Testament, which become clear in the light of the new gospel, 'in their turn illuminate and explain the new sacred books'. In fact, the New, hidden in the Old, is at the same time illuminated by it.

(2) This becomes clearer if we consider it in more detail. The fundamental principle of this assertion that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and that the Old is made manifest in the New, is taken from the words of St Augustine.[8] But we must note that St Augustine is actually speaking not of the books themselves but of the two divine plans and their mutual relationship. It was left to later tradition to draw the conclusion and apply the phrase also to the books themselves, as is done in the Constitution. This procedure is, as we have already seen, quite justified, since the essential purpose of the sacred books is to present in writing the whole scheme of salvation. Therefore, what is true of the plan is, within due proportions, true also of the books in which it is related or expounded (cf. no. 14).

(a) In order to show how the Old Testament is made manifest in the New, the Constitution starts from the fact that the books of the Old Testament have been entirely absorbed into the preaching of the gospel, and to prove this it quotes the testimony of St Irenaeus and St Cyril of Jerusalem and of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Nevertheless, still referring to the primary source, we may definitely assert that this 'absorption' of the Old Testament books into the preaching of the gospel can be directly observed and proved in the New Testament itself. We have already seen that Christ and his apostles made use of the sacred writings of the Old Testament to confirm the mission and dignity of his Person and also to confirm the doctrine they preached.[9]

(b) To demonstrate the fact that the books of the Old Testament 'acquire and show forth their full meaning' in the New, the Constitution appeals to various passages of the New Testament. It refers to Christ's words when he said he had come not to abolish the law but to fulfil it (cf. Matt. 5:17), and to the fact that Jesus, referring to Moses and all the prophets, explained to his disciples on the way to Emmaus how the Scriptures had referred to him (Luke 24:27; cf. also Rom. 16:25-26; II Cor. 3:14-16). It is moreover a fairly obvious truth that nothing shows the meaning of a prophecy as much as its fulfilment. If therefore the Old Testament was intended primarily to prepare, predict, and signify with various types and foreshadowings the coming of Christ, the Redeemer of the world, and of the messianic Kingdom, (cf. no. 15) then naturally all this became clear when Christ actually came to set up his Kingdom, and in the light of this truth and of its oral and written proclamation.

(3) The principles laid down in the Constitution in this chapter are of the greatest practical importance for the understanding and interpretation of Scripture. It is true that the Constitution does not speak directly of this, but of the way in which the books of the Old and New Testaments explain one another: whoever wishes to understand them must be guided by the books themselves, and therefore also by the way in which they interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New, and vice versa.

The practical rule for biblical interpretation which can be deduced from the doctrine here set forth is this, that in order to understand and explain the books of one Testament we must take into consideration, to the greatest possible extent, the books of the other, and obviously here it is not possible to explain at length the manifold implications and applications of this principle in biblical studies. We must confine ourselves to a few indications.

(a) We begin with the New Testament because today it is more and more widely admitted that it must be interpreted in the light of the Old. To interpret the New Testament in the

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[8] *Quaesto in Hept.* 2:73: P.L. 34, 673.

[9] Cf. above, chap. 3, pp. 74, 75; chap. 6, pp. 128, 129; cf. also what we have already said about the use of the Old Testament made in the New, and especially in 'Revelation'.

light of the Old means, for example, to bear in mind and make use of all that wealth of doctrine about God and man, and God's dealing with man, of all that wisdom about man's life, etc., which we have found amply expounded in the Old Testament whereas it is only referred to, summarized or taken for granted, in the New. At other times the New Testament may be profitably compared with the Old also as regards doctrine, the law, sin, the help of God's grace, etc., or passages in the Old Testament may be compared with passages dealing with the same themes in the New. Yet again, when illustrating the profound theological meaning of Christ's miracles, that is, pointing out how these works 'manifest and confirm the doctrine and truths signified by the words' (no. 2) and are explained in Christ's sermons, it will be useful to consider how God and his attributes are presented in the Old Testament: for example, God as the Lord of nature (cf. Psalm 28 [29]; 76 [77]: 17-21); God riding upon the wings of the wind (Psalm 16 [17]: 10; 103 [104]; the winds are his messengers Psalm 103 [104]: 4; 147: 18; Is. 40: 7). Remember above all those tremendous visions of God in the power and splendour of his creation (cf. Psalm 17 [18]: 8-16; 49 [50]: 3; 96 [97]: 2-5; Hab. 3: 3-12). These and other similar passages from the Old Testament cast a great light on the miracles of Christ and on his reasons for choosing one kind of miracle rather than another. The validity of this method is confirmed by the gospels themselves. In fact, the close connection between the person and mission of Christ and the Old Testament writing influences the evangelists' whole way of recounting the episodes of Christ's life: the choice of events and the manner in which they are described. All this proves their conviction that the whole of Old Testament revelation is directed towards the Messiah who appeared in the person of Jesus. So we are inspired to follow their example in our interpretation of the gospels.

(b) Then there is the principle of interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New. This principle seems at first more obvious and easy to follow, but actually it is the least observed. The reason lies perhaps in a certain diffidence and anxiety to avoid falling into the error of projecting into the more ancient texts what is instead only the result of a later growth of revelation. This danger is a real one. Nevertheless this anxiety should not prevent us from following, with proper precautions, such an obvious and useful principle of interpretation. Let us give a few examples. One we have already had in our preceding chapter, the 'woman' of God's first promise. Whereas the promise of the woman's victory over the serpent (Gen. 3: 15) remains mysterious if interpreted merely according to literary and historical criteria, when studied with the help and by the light of later revelation (together with sacred tradition) it can reveal the profound mystery of God's saving purpose. Another example of a more general nature: an excellent method of interpreting Old Testament passages is that of studying as closely as possible the way in which they are used in the New. In this connection we learn much from seeing how the prophetic texts of the Old Testament are used in the Apocalypse.

(c) One particular field, in which the interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the New is seen to be most useful and profitable, is that of the interpretation of those persons and events of the Old Testament which were 'types' or images of persons and events of the New. It is true that from time to time critics have been over hasty in discovering 'types' everywhere in the Old Testament. For this reason the encyclical *Divino Afflante* recommended sobriety and prudence in this field: 'Exegetes must beware of presenting as the true meaning of Holy Scripture other figurative meanings' (cf. E.B. 553), that is, meanings which were not intended by God as images of New Testament truths. But sobriety and prudence must not drive us to the opposite excess of under-estimating the significance of 'types', or even of denying their existence. The Constitution (no. 15) is here repeating what had already been said in the encyclical *Divino Afflante*: Certainly one must not deny the Scriptures all spiritual significance, for all that was said and done in the Old Testament was by God with supreme wisdom ordered and disposed in such a way that things of long ago foreshadowed future things which were to come to pass under the New Covenant of grace' (E.B. 559). The encyclical therefore urges exegetes to study not only the literary but also the figurative sense 'since it truly appears that God placed it there'; and it suggests the rules for discovering this: This sense is shown and taught to us by the divine Saviour himself in the holy gospels, it is professed both orally and in writing by the apostles, who in this follow their master's example, and it is pointed out by the constant tradition of the Church. Finally it is proclaimed in the very ancient use of the liturgy, in all those cases where the well known principle may rightly be applied: "The law of prayer is the law of faith" ' (E.B. 552).

Regarding the existence of these 'types' or foreshadowings, the Constitution quotes St Paul who, when speaking of the vicissitudes of the Israelites in the desert, writes: 'Now these things happened to them as a warning but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come' (I Cor. 10:11) (in Douai version: 'Now all these things happened to them in *figure*; and they are written for our correction . . .').

Here are a few examples of these 'types'. The *Declaration on Non-Christian Religious* affirms that 'the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed in the exodus of the chosen people from the land of their captivity', that is, from Egypt (no. 4). St Paul says that Adam was the type of the future Adam, that is, of Christ, the Head of redeemed mankind (cf. Rom. 5:14; cf. I Cor. 15:21-22, 45-49), that Sarah and Agar were types of the two Covenants, of the Old and New Testaments (cf. Gal. 4:24-31). St Peter says the ark of Noah is an image of baptism (I Peter 3:20-21). Finally we recall the frequency with which the Liturgy interprets the events of the Old Testaments as types of what was to happen under the New Covenant (cf. the Easter vigil).

In conclusion: From the earliest times the Church has understood the permanent value of the Old Testament and the divine instruction it contains. Therefore she has always made abundant use of it. In this way God, who spoke 'in many places and in various ways through the prophets' (no. 4) 'uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of his beloved Son' (no. 8). And so God teaches the Church, as once he taught the people of Israel, about his ways of dealing with men; he gives her divine instruction, so that she may gain a deeper and clearer understanding of these ways and make them more widely known among the nations (cf. no. 14).

There are profound reasons for this. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. Christ himself lives in her and continues to complete in her and by her means his work of redemption. In fact, the Church must realize in herself the mystery of Christ and reveal it to the world (cf. *Church*, no. 8). This Body is far from perfect—it still has to grow to the state of mature manhood (cf. Eph. 4:12-13).

Hence the unity of life and destiny shared by Christ and the Church, and it follows that what was written in the law, by the prophets, and in the Psalms about Christ is true also of the life of the Church. The Church also must fully share in Christ's desire that 'all that is written' may be fulfilled. To the Church also may be applied Christ's words: 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law and prophets, I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.' And Christ gives his reason very emphatically: 'For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass away from the law till all is accomplished'.' And he deduces the practical maxim: 'Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:17-19). All this is true also of the Church. She obeys Christ's teaching: 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old' (Matt. 13:52). This is what the Church does in her liturgy and her preaching, in which she makes full use of the writings of the Old Testament 'until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her' (no. 8).

10 | The New Testament

The chapter of the Constitution which deals with the New Testament begins with some fairly complex questions. First of all it must be fitted into the general outline of the Constitution itself, which means that the nature of the New Testament must be considered, and the place it occupies in the history of divine revelation and in particular in the Scriptures as a whole. Besides these general considerations, the explanation given in this chapter is, in the choice of problems and in their treatment, much influenced by contingent motives and by, one might say, topical themes, that is, by special problems and difficulties created by modern research.

The problems are as follows: what is the special place occupied by the New Testament in the general scheme of Scripture? Since the central and specific theme of the New Testament is obviously Christ and his Kingdom, a theme particularly prominent in the gospels, what place do the gospels occupy in the New Testament as a whole, what connection is there between the other New Testament books and the central theme which is Christ, and what special contribution do they make towards its explanation? Therefore the greater part, in fact more than half, of the chapter, is devoted to the gospels, the reason being that during recent years particular and grave difficulties have arisen, some of which still persist and even increase. In fact, as a result of their studies in literary criticism, and particularly in literary 'forms', certain scholars have begun not only to doubt the authenticity of the gospels, that is, that they were written by the authors whose names they bear, but even to deny their apostolic origin, which means to deny that they contain the preaching of the apostles. Even the historical truth of the gospels has been denied, obviously to the great detriment

of the faith. The Constitution deals only with the essential points of these difficulties: the apostolic origin of the gospels and their historical truth. In order to answer this last question the Constitution explains the literary form of the gospels, and their way of recounting the life, works and doctrine of Christ.[1]

The plan of the chapter is quite simple: first it explains the pre-eminence of the New Testament in the general plan of Scripture, and gives reasons for this (no. 17); then it explains the pre-eminence of the gospels among the New Testament writings, and their apostolic origin (no. 18); then it proceeds to study the historical accuracy of the events narrated in the gospels, and the way in which they describe the life and doctrine of Jesus (no. 19); finally the document deals with the special themes and objects of the New Testament writings and points out their relation to the central theme, which is Christ (no. 20).

The pre-eminent place of the New Testament in Holy Scripture

The answer to the question as to what place the New Testament occupies in Scripture is stated categorically at the very beginning of the chapter: 'The word of God, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (cf. Rom. 1:16) is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way in the writings of the New Testament' (no. 17). The reasons given for this affirmation remind us of paragraph no. 4, in which the Constitution explains how the history of salvation reaches the fulness of revelation in Christ. In giving these reasons the document's explanation is largely descriptive, proceeding by gradual steps. The first step: the appearance of Christ, the Word made flesh: 'For when the fulness of time arrived (cf. Gal. 4:4) the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in the fulness of grace and truth (cf. John 1:14)' (*ibid.*); then came the setting up of the Kingdom of God and the revelation of the

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[1] These problems had been dealt with, less than two years before the Constitution, by a special *Instruction* of the Pontifical Commission on Biblical Studies—cf. *Act. Ap. Sed.* 56, 1964, pp. 712-718. Cf. the author's *Study of the Synoptic Gospels*, Chapman, London, 1965.

Father and finally the fulfilment of Christ's mission on the day of Pentecost: 'Christ established the Kingdom of God on earth, manifested his Father and himself by deeds and words, and completed his work by his death, resurrection, and glorious ascension and by the sending of the Holy Spirit' (*ibid.*). The explanation concludes with the affirmation that Christ 'having been lifted up from the earth . . . draws all men to himself (cf. John 12:32, Greek text), He who alone has the words of eternal life (cf. John 6:68)' (*ibid.*).

In the last phase of the setting up of the Kingdom of God Christ draws all men to himself, but he does this by means of the preaching of the apostles and the propagation of the Church: 'This mystery had not been manifested to other generations as it was now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 3:4-6 Greek Text)' (*ibid.*). This revelation of the mystery of Christ is the characteristic mark of the New Testament which gives it a pre-eminent place in the history of salvation. And the purpose of revelation was 'so that they might preach the Gospel, stir up faith in Jesus, Christ and Lord, and gather the Church together' (*ibid.*).

Having thus described the New Testament's supreme function in the plan of salvation the Council goes on to speak of its sacred writings: 'To these realities the writings of the New Testament stand as a perpetual and divine witness' (*ibid.*). There follows then, as a natural conclusion, the initial affirmation of the Constitution that the word of God, which is always the 'power of God' for the salvation of the believer, is present and supremely powerful in the writings of the New Testament, because these contain the fulness of the revelation of God in Christ.

There is not much left to say about individual passages of this chapter, since, as we have said, it refers to what the document has already expounded when it said that the coming of Christ and his redemptive work were the culmination of the history of salvation. We have already amply commented upon this explanation (cf. chapt. 3), but there are a few details that must be emphasized.

(1) First of all there is the thought that the word of God is always the 'power of God' for the salvation of the believer. The text here makes substantial use of St Paul's words in his letter to the Romans: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith' (Rom: 1:16). Speaking of the 'word of God', the apostle is directly referring to the preaching of the gospel, but it is clear that this statement is true also of all Scripture, because in this the apostolic preaching is expressed in a special way (cf. no. 8). In fact, the apostle's affirmation is even more true with regard to the written word which, having been dictated by the Holy Spirit, is not only in content but in form also the word of God (cf. no. 9).

Nevetheless, the document does not quote the actual words of the apostle but adopts his general idea of the power inherent in the word of God, and uses it as a reason for affirming that in the writings of the New Testament the word of God 'shows its power in a most excellent way'. This is a very important passage because only here does the Constitution explicitly speak of the word of God as 'power' for the salvation of mankind, a thought which, in our first chapter, we illustrated in the light of Holy Scripture.[2]

This part of the Constitution is important also because of the way in which this affirmation is demonstrated, that is, not by this or that biblical text but simply by pointing to the central truths of the plan of salvation which are described in the books of the New Testament. The reasoning followed by the document may be briefly summarized: the plan of salvation in the New Testament is indeed the completion of revelation, the fulfilment of the work of Redemption, the foundation and propagation of the Church. These facts alone constitute divine strength and power and their proclamation, received by men in faith, means salvation for them. Now the writings of the New Testament are simply testimonies to all these divine works: moreover, they are not a merely human testimony but are inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore divine, quality strengthens the power inherent in the facts themselves.[3]

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[2] Further on (no. 21) the Constitution expounds substantially the same idea, in different terms.

This reasoning may appear somewhat subtle, and we may admit that it is not apparent at the first reading of the text. Nevertheless, this is the true structure of the text, the only one which explains the link between the initial affirmation of the special power possessed by the word of God in the New Testament and the successive explanations given in the text. Note that this explanation is introduced by 'for' (in Latin *enim*), so that right up to the last words of the paragraph (which, like the initial affirmation, speak of the *writings* of the New Testament) it is all presented as the justification of the initial affirmation. The last sentence: 'To these realities the writings of the New Testament stand as a perpetual and divine witness'—clearly implies that in the New Testament the word of God 'is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way', and this is an obvious conclusion. In fact if, as the Constitution says, the preaching of the apostles arouses faith and gathers the Church together, then the same is true in its own way also of the sacred writings of the New Testament, because this is no other than apostolic preaching, written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. no. 7). And this is that power of the word of God which is so pre-eminently revealed in the New Testament.[4]

(2) One of the elements of the power of God's word is also this, that the Church is 'gathered together' by the preaching of his word. The Constitution merely says this indirectly: the mystery of God's saving purpose has been revealed 'so that they (the apostles) might preach the gospel, stir up faith in Jesus, Christ and Lord, and gather the Church together' (no. 17). It is however explicitly affirmed in the various conciliar documents, especially in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.*

The above document in a passage which, like that in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, is largely descriptive says: 'By everywhere preaching the gospel (cf. Mark 16:20), which was accepted by their hearers under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the apostles gathered together the universal Church, which the Lord established on the apostles . . .' (no. 19). Similarly, speaking of the individual Churches, the same Constitution states explicitly that in them 'the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the gospel of Christ' (no. 26). The *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* also affirms: 'The people of God finds its unity first of all through the word of the living God' (no. 4).

The last point about this document we are studying: after all that it has said in chapter 3 about the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture and the consequences of this it may seem surprising to find it now asserting that the two inspired Testaments differ from each other in that the New Testament—unlike the Old—presents and reveals the word of God and its saving power in a pre-eminent manner. But we must note that this distinction has nothing to do with the inspired character of the books as such, or with all the consequences of this, because divine inspiration is naturally present equally in the writings of both Testaments. In fact, this paragraph is not referring to the pre-eminence of the New Testament as the inspired word of God, but to the supreme efficacy of these writings for the salvation of men.

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[3] Cf. Perarnau, *loc. cit.*, p. 127.

[4] Of course, when we state that the word written by God is the divine power for the salvation of all who believe, we are speaking of the word of God with all that it signifies and contains, with all its consequences, the benefits it confers on man, not isolated from the means of grace entrusted to the Church, but together with them. Yet it is the word of God itself which gives access to these treasures, these living fountains of grace.

The function of the word of God may also be illustrated by considering the part reserved to faith in the plan of salvation. The Council of Trent affirmed that faith is the beginning, foundation and root of all justification (cf. *Denz.*, 801), because it is by this act that man entrusts himself wholly to God (cf. *Revelation*, no. 5).

But this is true only in as much as salvation depends on man's co-operation, not because everything depends on faith alone. In order to understand this, let us think of the parable of the sower (cf. Matt. 13:1-8, 18-23). The seed of preaching needs to be received in the ground of the human heart, and there are many ways in which man can prevent it taking root and exercising its divine power. Nevertheless, it remains true to say that the divine and vital power is not in man himself but in the seed, that is, in the word of God. This is indeed the power and strength of which the Constitution speaks.

The distinction it makes between the New and Old Testaments has regard to the *object* of God's word in one and the other of these books. We must not forget that the Old Testament contains 'incomplete and temporary' things (no. 15), because although its books reveal the knowledge of God, of man, and of God's purpose, they do so 'in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ' (no. 15). In the New Testament instead God offers us in Christ the fulness and completion of revelation, the whole sacratment of his will for our salvation.

The gospels: the problem

The Constitution now deals directly with the gospels and first of all with the place they occupy among the writings of the New Testament, and then with their apostolic origin (no. 18).

(1) Concerning their place among the writings of the New Testament the Constitution once more examines the sacred books from the point of view of their *object*, in order to affirm that in this the gospels are supreme among all the other writings. 'It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the gospels have a special pre-eminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness of the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our Saviour' (no. 18). This passage needs very little explanation. The Council affirms the pre-eminence of the gospel as a matter of 'common knowledge', and explains this affirmation in very much the same way as that in which it has explained the pre-eminence of the writings of the New Testament, by referring to its subject matter. The New Testament is of supreme importance because its central theme is the Incarnation, the life of Christ, his preaching and the setting up of the Kingdom of God. In the same way a special pre-eminence is accorded to the gospels because they are 'the principal witness of the life and teaching of . . . our Saviour'.

(2) The supreme significance of the gospels in the salvation of man compels the Council—because of the Church's bounden duty most reverently to preserve and guard (cf. nos. 9 and 10) the deposit of faith—to do all it can to safeguard this most precious treasure. In performing this duty the Council, because of the peculiar needs of the time, feels an urgent need to affirm both the apostolic origin of the gospels (no. 18) and their historical accuracy (no. 19).

(a) We have already said that this section of the Constitution is particularly aimed at overcoming certain difficulties and objections that arise in our own time, in order to forestall any danger that might arise from these and become more widespread, and to dispel the doubts which are being ever more widely diffused by certain exegetical and theological schools. Before commenting directly on the Council's declarations concerning these dangers it may be useful to give the reader a brief account of the theories in question. Indeed, although it is true that the Constitution is not directly concerned with the confutation of these theories and does not attempt to solve all the problems which arise from them, nevertheless, as we shall see, the profound meaning, the importance to mankind today, and the scope of the conciliar teaching are best understood against the background of these theories.

(b) The above mentioned *Instruction* of the Pontifical Commission for Biblical Studies affirms that a searching examination of the gospels is more necessary today 'because many books are being distributed in which the truth of the sayings and deeds contained in the Gospels is being questioned'.[5] The general content of the *Instruction* makes it clear that it refers to the school of so-called form criticism, which in recent years has thrown new doubts upon the historical accuracy of the gospels.

(c) What is this form criticism and what are its theories? It sought to explain the origin of the gospels by composing the 'history', that is the origin and development of the literary 'forms' in which the evangelical message was presented, preached and handed down, before it was finally fixed in the gospels as we possess them today. It tries to trace, as it were, the 'history of the composition of the gospels'. In order to understand these critics, we must bear in mind the various sources from which they drew their ideas, and above all literary criticism, sociology, and the comparative history of religions. The first exponents of form criticism, applied to the New Testament and particularly to the gospels, were for the most part inspired by the studies of H. Gunkel on 'literary forms' and on the construction of the Book of Genesis and the Psalms, and by others who followed his example in their studies of the Old Testament. In applying the results of these studies and methods to the gospel narratives they have tried to investigate the origin of the actual text of the synoptic gospels, and through a critical study of this they have come to speak of the 'smaller literary units' which they presume to have existed before the gospel. They then describe the 'literary forms' of the various writings which make up these earlier works ('doctrinal maxims', 'controversies', 'accounts of miracles') and their vital context.

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[5] *Act. Ap. Sed.* 56, 1964, p. 712.

Now their vital context (*sitz im leben*), that is, the place in which the gospel message was born and grew to maturity, was the earliest Christian community. In order to understand the relationship between this community and the gospels, we must first of all know something about this community. Now the form critics say that an analysis of the subject matter of the gospels shows that the earliest Christian community which gave us the gospels (or rather, their subject matter) had much in common with the populace, the nameless multitudes from whom legends are born. In fact, at least according to some representatives of this school, the earliest Christian community was not, and could not be, interested in history, because it lived in the eager expectation of the fast approaching end of the world and the coming of Christ in glory. What interest therefore, could it have in the history of past events? In any case, these critics add, even without taking into account this thesis of the well known eschatological school, what interest do ordinary people like the apostles and the primitive Christian communities, have in history as such? This school speaks of 'legends' also, because the gospels treat of 'faith' and not of history.

According to these authors, faith and historical accuracy are incompatible: in fact they assert that faith means a prejudiced attitude with regard to its object, whereas the historian necessarily adopts an absolutely objective and impartial attitude, according to the famous principle laid down by Tacitus, that the historian must write 'without passion and attachment' (*Annales* 1:1). Another characteristic of this community, of this cradle of the gospel, was, according to form criticism, its 'creative talent'. When it was impressed by some event or saying reported by someone who had heard or seen it, the community developed it further, adding to it other elements created by its own fancy or borrowed from the religious ideas of that particular time and place, thus explaining and expanding the original material so that the fact grew as it was reported. Therefore these critics maintain: before being written down, the new gospel was subject to alterations, infiltrations and even in part to grave deformations.

Out of the various problems raised by this school the Constitution deals only with that of the authors and of the apostolic origin of the gospels (cf. no. 18); with that of their historical accuracy and their 'literary form', which means of the way in which they express the deeds and doctrines of Christ, and finally with the way in which the authors of the individual gospels have performed their task (no. 19).

The apostolic origin of the gospels

A fundamental principle must be borne in mind with regard to the apostolic origin of the gospels. It is very emphatically and insistently put forward in the Constitution: 'The Church has always and everywhere held and continues to hold that the four gospels are of apostolic origin' (no. 18). In other words, there is a universal tradition held at all times and in every place: 'always and everywhere'. And the reason is: 'For what the apostles preached in fulfilment of their mandate from Christ, afterwards they themselves and other apostolic men, under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, handed on to us in writing: the foundation of faith, namely, the fourfold gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John' (*ibid.*). Three things are here affirmed: (1) the subject matter of the gospels is no other than 'what the apostles preached in fulfilment of their mandate'; (2) this preaching was written down 'under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit' which guarantees that the gospels transmit the apostolic preaching faithfully and without error; (3) these gospels were handed down to the Church as 'the foundation of faith', that is, to use the technical term used by the Constitution (no 11), they were handed down as 'canonical'—as a norm of faith (cf. above chap. 6, pp. 129 ff).

(1) Concerning this process of reasoning we have only to remind the reader that its various elements have already been amply expounded and demonstrated in our preceding chapters. In fact, when commenting upon no. 7 we have already shown that generally speaking the writings of the New Testament in one way or another reflect the apostolic teaching. In no. 11 we saw the testimony of tradition with regard to the 'canon of sacred books' of the Old and New Testaments, the latter containing the gospels (cf. *Denz.*, no. 784; E.B. 59). They are therefore 'sacred and canonical' 'because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself' (no. 11).[6]

(2) Since however the particular reason why the Constitution at this point affirms the apostolic origin of the gospels, is in

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[6] Here the document uses a second century text of great authority, because it is of St Irenaeus. Not only is this author very near to apostolic times, but he is connected, through St Polycarp, the disciple of St John the evangelist, to this apostle himself.

answer to the theories of the form crititics (as we have seen above) let us add a complementary argument taken directly from Scripture. Form criticism affirms that the vital context (*sitz im leben*) in which the evangelic message was born and flourished was the primitive Christian community, and that this community had much in common with the populace, the nameless multitude from which legends are born. Apart from reservations of a general order which must be made concerning the methods used in this school,[7] let us merely say that numerous facts attested by the New Testament contradict these assertions.[8] The primitive Christian community was not an anonymous mass of people but a well known community, led by the apostles who were recognized as having been eye witnesses. This is how the community appears in Jerusalem, where Peter frequently preaches as head of the apostolic band (Acts 2:14-

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[7] In this connection the brief *Instruction* of the Biblical Commission, although admitting as a general rule that certain results of the researches of this school may be of positive value and ought to be examined, warns the student to proceed very cautiously. In order to justify this warning it offers the following judgment on the method in question: 'The above-mentioned method is often connected with inacceptable philosophical and theological principles which are frequently detrimental to the method itself and to the conclusions reached in literary questions. In fact, some champions of this method, inspired by rationalistic prejudices, refuse to admit the existence of the supernatural order and the intervention of a personal God in human affairs by means of revelation, as they also deny the possibility of miracles and prophecies. Others start with a false notion of the faith, as if this took no account of historical truth or were even incompatible with it. Others deny *a priori* the historical value and the character of the documents which describe revelation. Others again, showing scant respect for the authority of the apostles as being witnesses to Christ, as also for their ministry and influence in the primitive community, exaggerate the creative power of this community' (*loc. cit.*, p. 713).

We cannot here discuss the more general aspects of the approach of the form critics—although they are very often the real root of the evil—but only those more specific points which concern the study of the place and time when the gospel message was first proclaimed, and its manner of proclamation. With regard to prejudices of a more general nature it suffices to quote the severe verdict of the *Instruction*, which says that the above quoted presuppositions or premises of the method of form critics 'are not only contrary to Catholic doctrine but are without any scientific foundation and contrary to the correct principles of historical method' (*loc. cit.*, p. 714).

[8] Here we are considering the New Testament not as an inspired book but simply as a historical document worthy of credence.

40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32) after he has already, even before the coming of the Holy Spirit, acted as the leader of the apostles in the election of a substitute in the place of Judas (Acts 1:15-26). And later on, when the glad news is spread beyond Jerusalem, it is the two leaders, Peter and John, who go to 'inspect' the communities, for example, in Samaria (*ibid.*, 8:14-17); sometimes it is Peter alone who goes to the various cities of the Palestine plain (*ibid.*, 9:32-42). Later on Barnabas is sent for the same purpose from Jerusalem to Antioch (*ibid.*, 11:22-23). So we are not dealing with the preaching of enthusiastic fanatics, but with an apostolate which is strictly organized and controlled by the leaders themselves. Let us recall also what we have already said about the concept of 'tradition', as seen in many passages of the New Testament, where it means the intelligent acceptance of a doctrine, its preservation and faithful transmission.

Finally let us note that in all that we have said about the characteristics of the primitive Christian community, and on its manner of preaching and transmitting the doctrine and preserving it faithfully, we are not referring to testimonies written on purpose to prove some theory, but with simple and first hand descriptions of the life of this primitive community. As such, these accounts bear the indubitable mark of historical truth and prove that the theories of form criticism, applied to the primitive community which was the birthplace of the gospels, are not only without foundation but are contradicted by the facts.

The historical truth of the gospels

The affirmation of the apostolic origin of the gospels does not however solve all problems connected with the reliability of the gospels as historical documents. In fact, even when we have admitted their apostolic origin, we still must ask if, and to what extent, the apostles effectively transmitted truly and accurately the life, preachings and works of Christ. Moreover, we must investigate the way in which the sacred authors wrote down the apostles' words. In fact, it is true that the student of the gospels notices that the four gospels have, together with many similarities some noteworthy differences which need to be explained.

(1) To answer these problems the Constitution first affirms the historical truth of the gospels—even more forcefully and insistently than when it affirmed their apostolic origin, and immediately gives this justification: 'Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and continues to hold, that the four gospels just named, whose historical character she unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day he was taken up into heaven (cf. Acts 1:1-2)' (no. 19). This affirmation is made even more precise in the two passages which follow. First of all the Constitution refers to the nature of the apostolic preaching: since they were preaching after the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, they recounted the deeds and words of Jesus with a clearer understanding: 'Indeed, after the Lord's ascension the apostles handed on to their hearers what he had said and done. This they did with that clearer understanding which they enjoyed after they had been instructed by the events of Christ's risen life, and taught by the light of the Spirit of truth' (*ibid.*).

The second passage concerns the way in which the sacred authors wrote down the apostolic preaching: 'The sacred authors wrote the four gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explaining some things in view of the situation of their churches' (*ibid.*). The rules followed in this work by the sacred authors were always (1) 'to preserve the character of preaching' (2) 'to tell the honest truth about Jesus' (*ibid.*).[9] And the Constitution adds as a proof of this: 'For their intention in writing was that either from their own memory and recollections, or from the witness of those who themselves 'from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word' we might know 'the truth' concerning those matters about which we have been instructed (cf. Luke 1:2-4)' (*ibid.*).

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[9] In this text the Latin word *sincera* is properly translated as 'true' or 'genuine'.

We have purposely quoted the whole paragraph in which the Constitution deals with the historical nature of the gospels, because it is very important to see the Council's exposition *as a whole*. For the same reason we shall consider for a moment longer the method here used by the document we are studying. When we quoted the paragraph sentence by sentence we were already to some extent emphasizing its construction. The salient point is that the Council does not seek to demonstrate by argument its initial affirmation of the historical veracity of the gospels. It simply supports its assertion with a reference to tradition 'The Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and still holds . . .' and then explains the meaning of this historical veracity in more detail.[10]

(3) Now let us consider the various points of this passage (no. 19). With regard to the initial affirmation we must point out the unusual emphasis—unique of its kind in the whole document—with which the Constitution affirms the historical nature of the gospels. It begins with the solemn assertion: 'Holy Mother Church has held and still holds . . .' adding emphatically 'firmly and with absolute constancy'. As if this were not enough it speaks of the gospels 'whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts . . .'.[11] This emphasis is not surprising when we are aware of the grave damage done by form criticism, and especially by the movement for the so-called 'demythologisation' of the gospels. It is the expression of the Council's grave concern when confronted by the all too real dangers which come from this direction to undermine the faith of so many Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

The Constitution then affirms in more detail the faithfulness of the gospels in recounting what Jesus 'actually did and taught'. This fidelity to the real facts is true of the whole purpose and subject matter of the gospels, of 'all that he really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day he was taken up into the heaven'. These last words, used in the Acts of the Apostles to describe the ascension of Christ, show that the gospels cover also the period of the 'forty days' of which St Luke writes: 'To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the Kingdom of God' (Acts 1:3). This shows the full meaning of the words 'while living among men'. In fact, this period of the forty days after the resurrection may also properly be considered as the life of Jesus among men. This ample scope of the gospel accounts shows that even the fact of Christ's resurrection and his appearances after he has risen again, although they belong, strictly speaking, to another order of events (a supernatural order) are nevertheless also facts which have their place in human history, and are guaranteed by the historical veracity of the gospels. Finally we have the principle by which the accounts of the deeds and words of Jesus are governed: the evangelists describe all that Jesus did and taught for the 'eternal salvation' of men. We must bear this principle in mind for it will be important later on in our study of the 'literary form' of the gospels.

The document adds nothing more. As we have already said, the procedure it adopts here is different from its procedure with regard to almost all other questions. Here it is content to base its affirmation on tradition: (the Church has held and holds . . .') when it asserts the historical truth of the gospels, and furnishes no proofs, either of the initial affirmation or of the explanations which follow.[12]

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[10] It would be possible to summarize the Council's argument as follows: it is true that the apostles handed on the sayings and works of Jesus with that greater understanding which they had acquired after the glorious sufferings and death of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is true also that the sacred authors, in writing down the apostolic preaching, acted like true authors, choosing from among the mass of material, both oral and written, at their disposal, summarizing and explaining according to the condition of the churches. But all this does not impair the historical reliability of the gospels. In so far as this last affirmation refers to the apostles, the Council gives us no further explanation, but in so far as it refers to the evangelists the Council states that they 'told us the honest truth about Jesus' and that they wrote so that 'we might know the "truth" concerning those matters about which we have been instructed'.

[11] This last phase had been added almost at the end of the final revision of the text, in order to satisfy the legitimate anxiety that the historical truth of the gospels should be unequivocally expressed and affirmed.

The 'literary form' of the gospels

It is now our duty to put forward, within the limits of our commentary, some proofs of what the Council here expounds, and chiefly to deal with this question of the 'literary form' of the gospels, and the manner of writing adopted by the sacred authors, in order to demonstrate that both these lines of enquiry, far from casting a doubt on the historical truth of the gospels, serve to confirm it.

(1) What is the 'literary form' of the gospels? The reply is simple: it is 'preaching'. The Constitution carefully points out that in their work the evangelists have been careful to preserve 'the character of preaching' (no. 19); moreover it does not say that the gospels recount all the deeds and words of Jesus, but what he 'did and taught' 'for the eternal salvation' of men (*ibid.*). The preaching proclaims and explains the realities for the purpose of religious instruction, which must be accepted with faith in order to be a means of salvation for men and for the Church the foundation of faith (cf. no. 18).

Now we ask whether this religious purpose of arousing faith and preparing the salvation of men is compatible with fidelity to historical fact. We have already seen that form criticism has asserted that faith is incompatible with the attitude of a historian; faith, they say, in fact implies a *parti pris* in favour of its object, whereas for the historian an absolutely objective and impartial attitude is obligatory, according to the maxim of Tacitus that the historian must write 'without passion and attachment'.

(a) Obviously we cannot here treat this complex question in full and from a theoretical standpoint. Let us therefore set aside the various notions of 'faith' which do not concern us.[13] In our own case we shall see at once that the object of faith is intimately connected with the historical facts of the life of Jesus, and in fact takes them for granted. In opposition to the hypothesis of form criticism, the New Testament (considered merely as a historical document deserving of credence) shows that the apostles and their preaching are of authentic historical interest—as we shall shortly explain.

(b) In what sense can we affirm that the apostles were interested in history and that this historical interest is evident in their preaching? Obviously this is not historical interest in the sense of Græco-Latin and modern historical studies, that is of history closely studied with a regard for proper chronological order, which becomes an end in itself, but on the contrary an interest in past events as such, and the intention to recount and faithfully transmit them. The proof of this is seen in the very notion of a 'witness' and of 'witnessing' which in its various forms recurs more than fifty times in the New Testament. Indeed, a witness is a person who is in a position to make authoritative statements, on the basis of his direct personal experience. Now the apostles repeatedly call themselves witnesses to the life of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 10:41; 13:31; 22:15; 26:16; I Peter 5:1), just as Jesus had said to them before his ascension: 'You shall be my witnesses' (Acts 1:8; cf. Luke 24:48). After the ascension and before the coming of the Holy Spirit, when a substitute had to be chosen for Judas, certain clearly defined qualifications were explicitly required: he had to be an eye witness of all that Jesus did and said 'during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us', from his baptism till his ascension (Acts 1:21-22). St Paul also told the Corinthians who the chief eye witnesses were who had seen the risen Lord: 'He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep, then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles' (I Cor. 15:5-7).

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[12] The only exception is the final affirmation, that is, that the sacred author tell the truth about Jesus, which is already demonstrated.

[13] Let us therefore leave aside the complex problem which arises when 'faith' is understood in the Protestant sense of 'trust'; we understand faith in the Catholic sense, of the assent to truths proclaimed, so we may ignore the more general and theoretical question and consider only the problem we are about to put forward.

(c) We may object that this witness refers to Christ's resurrection; what guarantee have we of the other events described by the apostles? It is true that the primary object of this testimony is the resurrection of Christ, because of its fundamental importance, but this is by no means the only object. In fact it strictly implies the acceptance of all that has preceded it, for if the resurrection was the supreme glorification of Jesus, then it was all the more necessary to proclaim also his condemnation and death. And indeed we know that the earliest apostolic preaching gave the historical cause for his condemnation and death—the behaviour of the leaders of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:13, 15; 4:27; 5:30; 10:39; 13:28) and also a more fundamental supernatural cause, that is, the fulfilment of God's saving purpose, shown already in the Scriptures (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28; 13:27; I Cor. 15:3). These two causes are closely linked, and the lack of an account of the historical events might have led to doubts about the fulfilment of a special divine plan for salvation. Therefore it was necessary to recount not only the facts about the trial and death of Jesus, but also the previous events which had step by step led to the final conflict. It was necessary to expound the occasions and motives which gave rise to this conflict, the affirmations Jesus made about himself and his messianic and divine mission, and also his affirmations about the responsibility of the leaders of the Jews and about the future fate of the people, and finally it was necessary to show the birth, development and culmination of the conflict. In other words, the exposition of many points of doctrine was intimately connected with the description of the fundamental facts, and all this was of extreme importance because Jesus said very emphatically that with his coming the Kingdom of God had been set up (cf. Luke 11:20; Mark 1:15). In the familiar words: 'it was said of old . . . but I say to you' he set himself and his own doctrine in opposition to the fundamental doctrine of Moses and of the legislation of the Old Testament. The doctrine of Jesus was therefore not merely one of the many traditions handed on by the chosen people, but the doctrine of the promised master of the age of the Messiah.

(2) We must define historical interest more precisely by calling it historical-biographical interest. Obviously this does not mean that the evangelists intended to write a life of Jesus, complete and chronologically exact in the modern sense of the word: this was not what Jesus required of them. We are speaking of biography only in the sense in which preaching intends to preserve the facts concerning the life of an individual person, Jesus, the realities of his existence and activity, as well as of his doctrine. His death and resurrection, as the principle facts of his existence need a great deal of explanation in the context of his life, it follows that this historical-biographical interest must extend to the whole life and doctrine of Jesus.

It is therefore legitimate to conclude that faith and historical truth—in the sense which we have explained—far from being mutually opposed, pre-suppose and confirm each other. Faith presupposes and guarantees total historical veracity.

(3) We may further note that the religious purpose does not impair historical accuracy, and does not even influence the presentation of the facts. It is true that this purpose requires that the facts shall be explained to people who are ignorant of them, or who belong to periods and places very different from that in which these events took place. It is also true that the account of the deeds and words of Jesus were given, as our document points out, by the Apostles with that clearer understanding which they enjoyed after they had been instructed by the events of Christ's risen life and taught by the Spirit of truth, which descended on them at Pentecost. Their faith had ripened and they could now understand many things which they had not understood during the earthly life of Jesus, but this is a question of a more thorough understanding and explanation of events which had actually been spoken by Jesus, not

a case of invention or of 'creative activity'. To understand and explain more thoroughly does not mean to alter the truth, but rather to be more faithful to it, for by so doing the reliability of the historical facts recounted, far from being impaired, is strengthened! That the apostles took care not only to expound the truth but also to preserve it intact is shown by what we have already said about the primitive Christian community and the discipline it exercised in order to preserve doctrine in all its purity.

The literary work of the evangelists

The historical value of the gospels depends not only on the historical truth of the apostles' preaching, but also on the way in which the evangelists wrote their gospels. Let us consider the methods of the sacred authors and the results of these methods in all that regards the historical accuracy of the gospels. What then was the function of the evangelists in writing their books? It is very important to discern this clearly. It is not to be considered to be on the same plane as the printing of a speech or sermon. Even if ancient tradition tells us that St Mark based his gospel upon the preaching of St Peter, and if St Luke shows a general affinity of ideas with the preaching of St Paul, this is not to be understood in an exclusive sense. In fact, St Luke himself speaks of his work in a very general way: just as others before him had written about 'the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eye witnesses and ministers of the word', so he did also, having 'followed all things closely' from the beginning (cf. Luke 1:2).

(1) In describing the method of composition followed by the evangelists the Constitution makes substantial use of the already mentioned *Instruction* of the Pontifical Commission for Biblical Studies. This says that the sacred authors wrote down the preaching of the apostles 'in the four gospels, for the good of the Church, following a method which was conformable to the purpose which each one set himself. They chose some things and composed a synthesis out of others; they explained some things according to the condition of the individual churches' (*loc. cit.* p. 715).

(2) What effect did this method have on the historical truth of the gospels? First of all we must remember that it is not contrary to historical truth to choose among the things to be handed down. Indeed, some choice is necessary and inevitable. The truth is always immensely rich and whoever wished to write it down would have to make a choice. This is even more true of the life and public activity of Jesus. Think, for example, of John's words at the end of his gospel: 'But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (John 21:25).

Naturally the apostle is here using a form of hyperbole. But the inexhaustible riches of the life of Christ which he seeks to indicate in this way are certainly plainly seen in the gospels. It is also, for the same reasons, necessary to form a synthesis. The choice and the synthesis are all the more obligatory because the gospels are relatively small books, and it became necessary to give a fuller explanation of certain events and their circumstances as the message was handed on to the nations who did not know the land in which Jesus had lived, or its customs.

(3) We have said that neither the choice nor the synthesis is in itself detrimental to historical truth. But nevertheless they are very delicate procedures, especially in our present case when it is a question of the life and preaching of the God-Man, and the revelation of things which 'transcend the understanding of the human mind' (no. 6). How then can we be sure of the gospel's historical truth? Our guarantee depends partly on the strict training which these authors received in the primitive Christian community which was, as we have seen, extremely anxious and careful to safeguard the integrity and purity of the truth. The sacred authors were writing—as our Constitution says, in the words which St Luke used of himself—'In order

that we might know the truth (cf. Luke 1:2-4) concerning these matters about which we have been instructed' (no. 19). We may add that a close examination of their writings confirms the fidelity and earnestness of the evangelists in imparting to us the truth. The final and infallible guarantee rests obviously only on the divine inspiration of the gospels which enables them to 'teach firmly, faithfully and without error' that truth which God wanted (no. 11) put into the gospels for our salvation (cf. no. 11), that is, all that Jesus, the Son of God, really did and taught (cf. no. 19).

The other writings of the New Testament

About the other writings of the New Testament the Constitution has many essential things to say, and it says them very briefly (no. 20). Here it is no longer a question, as it was with the gospels, of solving problems, but rather of explaining, with pastoral purpose and care, almost in a catechetical form, what these other writings are and what is their function, and how they are connected with the central theme of the New Testament, which is Christ. We shall therefore comment upon this section simply and briefly, almost paraphrasing it, and summarizing its particular themes.

The Constitution first refers in general terms to the list of these writings: 'Besides the four gospels, the canon of the New Testament also contains the epistles of St Paul and other apostolic writings, composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit' (no. 20). Then it speaks of their content and general aim: 'In these writings, by the wise plan of God, those matters which concern Christ the Lord are confirmed, his true teaching is more and more fully stated, the saving power of the divine work of Christ is preached' (*ibid.*). The words we have quoted may be taken to refer in a general way to all the writings of the New Testament, whereas those which follow concern principally (but not exclusively) the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation. In fact, the Constitution goes on to say that in these writings 'the story is told of the beginnings of the Church and her marvellous growth, and her glorious fulfilment is foretold' (*ibid.*).

More important than this obvious and summary analysis of the contents of the other writings of the New Testament is the thought which this analysis seeks to express, that is, their one single theme, which is Christ. In their various ways they speak of Christ, of his person, his doctrine and his work, of Christ as a man and of the mystical Christ which is the Church, of her beginnings and of her final consummation.

In conclusion, the Constitution draws on the twofold source of these writings, of the doctrine which they expound and the events which they describe; all this was made possible and was effected because Christ, as he had promised, was present with his own and had sent the Holy Spirit to enable them to comprehend the truth: 'For the Lord Jesus was with his apostles as he had promised (cf. Matt. 28:20) and sent to them as Paraclete the Spirit who would lead them into the fulness of truth (cf. John 16:13)' (*ibid.*).

Let us briefly summarize the principal results of our study of the chapter on the New Testament. First of all, implicitly comparing the New Testament with the Old, the Constitution assigns to it a pre-eminent place in the Scriptures. This is due not to the inspired nature of these writings, for this inspiration is common also to the Old Testament, but to their purpose and subject: the incarnate Word, his life, his works and the establishment of his Kingdom. Because of this purpose the word of God, which is divine assistance for the salvation of all who believe, is present and manifests its power in a pre-eminent way in the writings of the New Testament.

Because of this special purpose the gospels excel all the other books of the New Testament, because they constitute the principle testimony to the life and doctrine of the incarnate Word, our Saviour. For this reason, and because of certain errors and dangers present in our own days, the central part of our chapter is devoted to the gospels. The document affirms and explains their apostolic origin and the historical truth with which they faithfully transmit all that Jesus the Son of God, while he lived among men, actually did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up into heaven.

In affirming and expounding the supreme efficacy of the New Testament for purposes of salvation, and in explaining the contents of the other writings, apart from the gospels, of which it is composed, the Constitution points out the one divine authorship of all and the one divine theme of the whole New Testament, which is Christ: the life, works and doctrine of the personal Christ, and the beginnings, development and laborious growth through history, and final fulfilment of the mystical Christ which is the Church. Therefore it is Christ himself who, naturally making use of human authors, speaks to us in the Holy Spirit about himself and about our being united with him; it is Christ the Head who in the Holy Spirit speaks to us of the whole Body of Christ, the Head and the Members.

11 | Holy Scripture in the life of the Church

The last chapter of the Constitution, still on the subject of the written word of God, now descends to practical details in order to indicate the significance of Scripture in the life of the Church and in all the fields of her activity. Naturally this has already been referred to more or less explicitly in earlier chapters, for example, where it is said that tradition gives us a more profound understanding of Scripture and makes it effective, adding that God continues, through the inspired writings, to speak with the Church, the Bride of his beloved Son (cf. no. 8), and that Scripture is a means of teaching, convincing, educating and so on—in other words, that it is the finest instrument for pastoral work (no. 11). In this final chapter the Council seeks to show that all the wonders it has revealed about Scripture in the three preceding chapters have become part of the life of the Church, and that this contribution must go on increasing.

Obviously it was not possible for the Constitution to explain in detail all the applications of this teaching to the Church's many spheres of activity. Moreover, several other Council documents, when need arose, had already considered the use of Scripture in all the diverse manifestations of the Church's life, so it was not necessary to go all over this again. It was therefore thought sufficient merely to formulate the principles and refer briefly to some of their practical applications, leaving other documents to go into more detail. All these reasons make it particularly necessary, in explaining the present chapter, to give an adequate idea of what Scripture means in the life of the Church and to illustrate the Council's intentions concerning it, and this means bearing in mind all the Council documents which have dealt with this theme. In fact it is surprising to discover—as we shall in the exposition which follows—that the spirit of this final chapter of the Constitution has effectively inspired a whole series of Council documents. Among these are worthy of special mention the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the *Decrees on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, on the *Apostolate of the Laity* and on *Ecumenism*. And this proves that what our document here expounds and lays down was already alive and widespread in the general mind of the Church, particularly as a consequence of the recent great development of the biblical movement.

Let us now briefly describe the plan of this chapter in the Constitution. It opens with a general consideration of the meaning of Scripture in the life of the Church, of the way in which the Church treats it and the use she makes of it (no. 21). Proceeding then to deal with the various ways in which Scripture is used, it illustrates all that the Church does to give the faithful open access to holy Scripture by means of translations (no. 22), and to further a more profound understanding (no. 23); then it explains the use made of Scripture in theology and in preaching (no. 24), the reading and study of the sacred writings by both clergy and laity, and their diffusion also among non-Christian people (no. 25).

The bread of the word and the eucharistic bread

The general consideration of the practical use of the Holy Scriptures made by the Church is like a great overture which solemnly opens this new chapter and largely dominates its whole content: it contains almost all the main themes of all that follows. In fact this is the most lively, emphatic passage in the whole Constitution, full of warm piety and sometimes even of tender emotion.

(1) The Council begins by comparing Scripture with Our Lord's eucharistic Body, in order to show the profound veneration felt by the Church for the sacred writings which are the bread of life: 'The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the Body of the Lord, since both from the word of God and the Body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especial in the sacred Liturgy' (no. 21). This is an extraordinarily effective and persuasive introduction. If the reader still feels some doubts as to whether these words should be taken 'with a grain of salt', he need only reflect briefly on the undoubted fact, here recorded in the Constitution, that the sacred Liturgy has always made abundant use of the Scriptures, especially in the Divine Office and in the Mass. We may not deny that there have been decadent periods, in which the preaching of Scripture and the pursuit of biblical studies were neglected, but even during those times the bread of God's word was permanently offered to God's children in the Liturgy. At least with readings and a minimum of explanation, if only of the Sunday gospel passages, the Church continued to offer the faithful the food of the word of God.

The affirmation of the veneration with which the Church regards Scripture is rendered particularly persuasive and effective by the comparison with the eucharistic Body of Christ: 'The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the Body of the Lord, since from both the word of God and the Body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the Bread of life . . .' (no. 21). This coupling together, as if of two equally valid elements, of the bread of the word and the bread of the Body of Christ is shown in a visible and eloquent manner in the ancient custom which still survives in the Christian churches of the East, and which is coming back into use in the West, that of keeping the Bible always in view upon the altar or in some other obvious position in the sanctuary.[1]

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[1] The Constitution does not quote the testimony of tradition to support the facts that the Church has always venerated Scripture as she venerates the eucharistic Body of the Lord. But the official document, in which the Theological Commission replied to the amendments suggested by the Council, noted that the idea here put forward was found not only in the *Imitation of Christ* but also in the fathers of the Church. They quoted relevant passages from St Jerome and

(2) We have already seen, when speaking of the use of the Old Testament, the use of Scripture in the sacred Liturgy. A further illustration is seen in the new decisions made by the Council, as in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,* in order to guarantee and further this use. We give the substance of these decisions.

(a) First of all we must emphasize the profound spirit of faith which has prompted these decisions. The Council which professes its profound faith that Christ is 'present in the sacrifice of the Mass', declares also that in the Liturgy Christ 'is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the church' (*Liturgy*, no. 7). This principle is repeated in a slightly different form when the Council speaks of the didactic and pastoral character of the Liturgy: 'In the Liturgy God speaks to his people and Christ is still proclaiming his gospel' (*Liturgy,* no. 33).

(b) This is then the general principle which governs the use of Scripture in the Liturgy: 'Sacred Scripture is of supreme importance in the celebration of the Liturgy' and the Constitution proceeds to give the reason for this: 'For it is from Scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration, and it is from Scripture that actions and signs derive their meaning' (*Liturgy,* no. 14). In other words: it is not merely a question of readings from the Bible; the Liturgy in its readings and songs, in prayers, hymns, ritual, actions and gestures is wholly inspired by Scripture and so inspires the liturgical community itself. Hence this practical conclusion with regard to liturgical reform: 'Thus if the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred Liturgy are to be achieved, it is necessary to promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the venerable tradition of both Eastern and Western rites gives testimony' (*ibid.*).

(c) From the general principle are derived the following practical rules: (1) 'In sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from Holy Scripture, and it is to be more varied and suitable' (no. 35). (2) '. . . The ministry of preaching is to be fulfilled with exactitude and fidelity. Moreover, the sermon should draw its contents mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources. Its character should be that of a proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation, that is, of the mystery of Christ, which is ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy' (*ibid.*). (We shall speak more at length about preaching later on.) (3) 'Bible services should be encouraged, especially on the vigils of the more solemn feasts, on some weekdays in Advent and Lent, and on Sundays and feast days. They are particularly to be commended in places where no priest is available . . .' (*ibid.*). (4) The general principle of the abundance and variety of readings from the Bible in the liturgy is applied also to the Divine Office: 'Readings from sacred Scripture are to be encouraged so that the riches of God's word may be more easily accessible in more abundant measure' (no. 92).

The supreme rule of faith

The Constitution now gives more details about how and why the Church is nourished by the word of God: 'The Church has always regarded the Scriptures, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, and will ever do so.' The Constitution immediately sets out the Church's reasons for this: 'For, inspired by God and committed once and for all to

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St Augustine, and referred to Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale* I, p. 523. St Hilary speaks of the two 'tables', the *mensa Domini* and the *mensa lectionum dominicarum* (*loc. cit.*, p. 50).

Congar asserts that the widespread adoption of this idea is due to the *Imitation of Christ.* (See chapter entitled 'The Body and Blood of Christ and the holy Scriptures are most necessary unto a faithful soul' (Bk. 4, chap. 11, IV). There are naturally some differences between this text and that of our Constitution, but in the *Imitation* also there twice occurs the idea of Holy Scripture being food, ('two tables'—'the table of sacred doctrine') and we note in both texts the parallelism drawn between Holy Scripture and the eucharistic bread.

'The two-fold table of sacred Scripture and the Eucharist' is mentioned also in the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (no. 18) and the *Decree on the Renewal of the Religious Life* speaks of the 'table of the divine law and of the sacred altar' (no. 6).

writing, they impart the Word of God himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and apostles' (no. 21).

(1) A superficial reading of this text, which speaks of the 'rule of faith' might lead one to suppose that it refers to the authentic decisions of the ordinary or solemn teaching office of the Church which defines this or that point of doctrine. But the thought of the Constitution here is much broader. It is not thinking only of the relatively few cases when such decisions were made, but of the Church's continual endeavour to feed herself on the word and minister it to the faithful. This is clear from what has been said before about ministering this food of the divine word, and it is confirmed by what follows; in fact, the Council immediately draws the conclusion that all preaching—not only the particular decisions of the *Magisterium*—'must be nourished and ruled by Holy Scripture'.

(2) When we return to the principle that the Church considers the divine Book to be the supreme rule of faith more than one reader may be somewhat surprised by the fact that the document immediately adds that Scripture is the supreme rule of faith, 'together with sacred tradition'. At this point the word of God seems to be treated as if it were on the same plane as sacred tradition which, although it transmits divine revelation and so is in this sense the word of God to men—yet is not formally the word of God, like Scripture. But this matter is soon cleared up. We must understand this brief addition, 'together with sacred tradition' in the light of the full explanation which the document has already given on this subject (nos. 8-10). It has explained that 'sacred tradition and holy Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church' (no. 10) and that it is the apostles' task to preserve, expound and preach this divine message in the light of the Spirit of truth (cf. no. 9). In this way sacred tradition does indeed enable us to understand Scripture more profoundly and makes it more effective, but it is by means of his own inspired word that God continues to speak to the Church, the Bride of his beloved Son (cf. no. 8).

This pre-eminence of Holy Scripture, in as much as it is inspired by God, is confirmed in the Council's reason for asserting that the written word of God is the supreme rule of faith. First of all, the divine books, inspired by God and written down once for all, unfailingly impart the unchanging word of God. This indeed, as we have already seen, was the main reason why God added to the live preaching of revelation the written word in order to confer upon the transmission of God's truth the greatest possible fidelity and certainty. For only inspired writings (cf. no. 11) 'teach firmly, faithfully and without error' the whole truth which God desired to be consigned to writing for our salvation. But fidelity was not the only reason. There was another more profound cause: God himself wished to be personally present in his own word, which was clothed in human speech but nevertheless formally his own. Therefore the document adds that the sacred writings are the supreme rule of faith, also because, in the words of the prophets and apostles, they echo the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The efficacy and power of the word of God

The thought that Scripture is the supreme rule of faith, and the reasons given to prove this, serve the Council as premises for an extremely interesting conclusion regarding the preaching of the Church and the source from which it draws its efficacy and power: 'Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture' (no. 21). In these words 'like the Christian religion itself' our document implicitly recalls all it has previously said about Scripture being the Church's supreme rule of faith, and about her anxious care to provide the faithful with this bread of life.

(1) This affirmation concerning preaching is of the greatest significance, and the Council is careful to indicate at once its

profound reasons. First of all, 'in the sacred books our Father in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them' (*ibid.*). This is the same idea that we saw already (no. 8), that is, that in the Bible God himself continues to speak with the Church, the Bride of his beloved Son. Now we deduce, from the fact that in Scripture God speaks with his children, the necessity of preaching, being nourished and directed by these sacred writings. For the proper function of preaching is that of bringing the word of God to men so that God may speak directly to them. Undoubtedly the best way to achieve this purpose is to make the greatest possible use in preaching of what is literally God's own word, that is Scripture. In this way God speaks directly to man through his inspired word.

The second reason given by the document is the supreme efficacy of the word of God for the salvation of men. This thought has already been expressed (no. 17): 'The word of God is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe' but now it is stated in other and more detailed terms: 'the force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life' (no. 21).[2]

(2) These are great words. In a certain sense all that we are about to say concerning the use of Scripture in preaching, in the life of clerics, priests and faithful, is summed up in this text and has its foundation in this profound truth. In order to give further confirmation to this truth the document quotes two passages from the New Testament. The former is taken from the letter to the Hebrews, in which St Paul exhorts the faithful not to be deaf to the voice of God, and points out the responsibility which falls upon all who have heard his word, and adds that this word has a share in the divine nature of God from whom it proceeds: 'For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do' (Heb. 4:12-13). The second passage is taken from St Paul's farewell speech at Miletus: 'And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified' (Acts 20:32). 'The word of his grace' is the gospel, because it is power for the salvation of all who believe (cf. Rom. 1:16) and it is able to use men as if they were living stones and build them up into the holy temple of God (cf. Eph. 2:20-22) and make them sharers in the sacred inheritance, which is salvation and all that this signifies.[3]

The faithful must be given free access to Scripture

From this profound and forceful affirmation of the efficacy and power of the written word of God the Council draws a logical conclusion of a practical nature, firmly asserting that 'easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful' (no. 22). Then come the following practical applications of the doctrine of the love and veneration which the Church feels for Scripture, and of the use to which it must be put. In fact, the rest of the chapter seeks in various ways to make the use of Scripture available and effective for all members of the Church.

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[2] These words are taken from the encyclical *Divino Afflante* which, however, is not quoted. Here the encyclical is directly referring to seminarists, saying that, as a result of correct teaching of Holy Scripture in the seminaries, the written word of God will become a pure and perennial source of spiritual life for the students. But the Council, while using the words of the encyclical, is considering all members of the Church when it asserts that Holy Scripture will be their pure and perennial source of spiritual life (cf. E.B. 567).

[3] This might seem the proper place to discuss the practical use of Holy Scripture in the various forms of preaching. But we note that the Constitution mentions preaching only briefly and generally and passes on to the broader theme of the saving power of Holy Scripture and its function in the lives of the faithful. It speaks of preaching later on, after having spoken of theology (cf. no. 24), so that the subject of preaching is closely linked with the proper training of all ministers of the word (cf. no. 25).

(1) The Church's first concern in this field is to offer her members the authentic text of the Bible. Since very few can read it in its original languages the question of translations is very important. The Church's anxiety on this score is first illustrated with a reference to the past, which also offers the Council the opportunity to express its veneration for the ancient translations which have been sanctified by more than a thousand years of continual use: 'That is why the Church from the very beginning accepted as her own that very ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament which is named after seventy men; and she has always given a place of honour to other translations, eastern and Latin, especially the one known as the vulgate' (no. 22). It is not necessary here to comment upon this passage for explanations are to be found in the various books of general introduction to Scripture. We must underline only one example of the Church's constant and watchful care with regard to translations. We refer to the case of the Latin version known as the vulgate. We all know what an important role was played by St Jerome, both with his translation of the Old Testament and with the correction of the already extant translation of the New. Setting aside other similar labours devoted to the same translation,[4] we mention only one of very recent date: in 1965, fifteen centuries after St Jerome's work, the Pope set up a 'Commission for the new vulgate', entrusting to it the task of revising the old and venerable version in order, not to re-write it in more classical Latin, but rather to make it more faithful to the original inspired texts.[5]

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[4] For example, the Council of Trent's laborious endeavour to prepare a revised and exact edition. Many years of work have already been devoted to establishing an authentic and critical text of St Jerome's translation and there is now a new Latin translation of the Psalms prepared, by command of Pius XII, from the original text and published in 1945.

[5] Cf. Pope Paul's discourse to the cardinals, Christmas 1966. Speaking of the 'new vulgate' he said: 'We are considering a text in which that of St Jerome's vulgate will be most closely followed wherever he faithfully reproduces the original texts, as established by modern scholarly editions; it will be prudently corrected where he differs from the original, or fails in correct interpretation, using Christian "biblical" Latin; in this way we shall show respect both for tradition and for the balanced judgment of scholars of our own day. So the Latin Liturgy will have a single text, scientifically irreproachable, faithful to tradition, to correct interpretation and to Christian speech; it will serve also as a point of reference for all the vernacular versions' (*Osservatore Romano*, 24 Dec. 1967, p. 3).

(2) Another preoccupation of the Church has been to prepare translations in modern languages: 'since the word of God should be available at all times, the Church with motherly concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred Bible' (no. 22).[6] The encyclical *Divino Afflante* gives the following reason for this preference for 'original texts': 'The original text, the direct product of the sacred author's inspiration, has greater authority and greater significance than any translation, ancient or modern, however good it may be' (E.B. 547). In fact it is only the original text that is inspired, not the translations. The same encyclical then explains the meaning of the Declaration in which the Council of Trent conferred juridical authenticity on the Latin translation kown as the vulgate,[7] and adds that this Declaration 'in no way forbids the proving and confirming of this same doctrine by reference to the original texts—in fact it insists upon this being done. It requires us also to refer to these ancient texts in order to discern and declare with ever greater certainty the true sense of the divine books. Even the Decree of the Council of Trent did not forbid the preparation of translations in other languages, from these ancient texts themselves, for the use and profit of the faithful and to further the understanding of the divine word. And we know that in many

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[6] Here the Constitution speaks also of translations made in common with our 'separated brethren'. We shall refer to these later on when we are speaking of the importance of Scripture in the ecumenical field.

[7] The purpose of the relevant decree of the Council of Trent, says the encyclical, was to assert that this translation 'is totally preserved from error in all that concerns faith and morals. This immunity, of which the Church offers testimony and confirmation, means that in all discussions, readings and sermons, the vulgate may be quoted with all certainty and without fear of error.' It is therefore not a matter of *literary* authenticity, that is, that the vulgate corresponds in every detail to the original texts, but of *juridical* authenticity (cf. E.B. 549).

countries this has been done in a praiseworthy manner and with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority (*ibid.*).

An ever more profound understanding of Scripture

Obviously it is not enough to provide translations. It is also necessary to see that there shall be an ever more profound understanding of the texts, so that the whole Church may benefit. The Constitution proceeds: 'The Bride of the incarnate Word, and the pupil of the Holy Spirit, the Church is concerned to advance day by day towards a deeper understanding of the sacred Scriptures' (no. 23). Notice that, returning to the considerations already expressed in paragraph no. 21, the document insists that the purpose of this anxious care is 'to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God' (*ibid.*).

It is not difficult to see that here the document is speaking (although from a different standpoint and with another end in view) of the growth of tradition, of which it spoke in paragraph no. 8. It is by means of tradition that the understanding of things and words transmitted grows ever deeper, and with the help of tradition that 'the Church constantly moves forward towards the fulness of divine truth' (*ibid.*).

Now this progress in the understanding of Scripture is twofold: in profundity and in breadth. The document has already dealt at length (no. 11) with the progress in profundity, largely due to a strict scientific interpretation of the sacred writings. Here instead it is mostly (though not exclusively) concerned with progress in diffusion, in keeping with the pastoral purpose of this chapter. All the remaining part of the Constitution is devoted to this progress in the diffusion of understanding. The theme deals with the study of the ancient fathers and of the Liturgies, the work of exegetes and other theologians for the training of preachers who shall be able to offer the faithful the nourishment of the Scriptures, it also deals with theological studies in general, and every kind of pastoral instruction (no. 24), the reading and study of Scripture by the religious and secular clergy, and by the faithful (no. 25).

(1) 'Therefore [in order to acquire an ever deeper knowledge of Holy Scripture] the Church rightly encourages the study of the holy fathers of both East and West, and of sacred Liturgies' (no. 23). This brief sentence refers to the truth which our document had already spoken of in its account of tradition: 'The words of the holy fathers witness to the living presence of this tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church' (no. 8). The need to study the holy fathers was implicit in the affirmation that in order to perceive the exact meaning of the sacred writings one must take into account 'the living tradition of the whole Church' (no. 12). What the Constitution is now saying is rather that the holy fathers must be studied because such study helps to nourish the children of the Church with divine food. The great value for this purpose of the writings of the holy fathers is pointed out in the encyclical *Divino Afflante*. While admitting that the holy fathers were 'less instructed in profane science and the study of languages than the literary scholars of our own day' it nevertheless affirms that in compensation, because of their divinely appointed office in the Church, they are distinguished by a certain wonderful insight into heavenly things and by a remarkable shrewdness of intellect, so that they can pierce to the heart of the divine word and bring to light all that can be of help in explaining Christ's teaching, and in promoting holiness of life' (E.B. 554). In other words, here too the Scriptures are said to be the food of divine life in the believer (no. 21).[8]

(2) Another most important means for spreading a deeper understanding of the sacred writings among the faithful is the training

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[8] Concerning the fathers of the Church cf. above chap. 8, note 7, and the following exhortation from *Divino Afflante:* 'When we consider the great labours undertaken by Catholic exegetes over nearly two thousand years, in the effort to make the word of God, communicated to men in the Bible, ever more profoundly understood and loved, there arises spontaneously in our heart the conviction that the faithful, and especially the clergy, have a grave obligation to use to the full this treasure accumulated by great minds over so many centuries' (E.B. 566).

of future ministers of the word. For this purpose it is necessary that the work of exegetes and other theologians must aim at ensuring that priests shall be adequately prepared in this field. Therefore the document asserts: 'Catholic exegetes then and other students of sacred theology, working diligently together and using appropriate means, should devote their energies, under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church, to an exploration and explanation of the divine writings. This task should be carried out in such a way that as many ministers of the divine word as possible may be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God, thereby enlightening their minds, strengthening their wills, and setting men's hearts on fire with the love of God' (no. 23). In this passage the emphasis is on the manner of study and instruction: 'The instruction must be such that the greatest possible number of ministers of the divine word may be trained to expound the Scriptures to the faithful.' The importance of the passage lies in the fact that it indicates that the primary purpose of the teaching of Scripture in the seminaries is a pastoral intention, that is, the training of those who are to offer the faithful the bread of the word, and also lies in its emphasis on the fact that the explanation of the sacred writings to the faithful is not the monopoly of professional exegetes only, but must be given by the greatest possible number of preachers.

The method of teaching the Scriptures to future priests, referred to here, is more amply described in the encyclical *Divino Afflante*: 'The professors of sacred Scripture must teach the whole biblical course in the seminaries in such a way that they may impart to the young men destined for the priesthood and the sacred ministry that knowledge and love of the Bible without which it is useless to hope for good fruits from their apostolate. Therefore in exegetical study they must take care to bring out the theological content; avoiding superfluous arguments and discarding what is more a field for curious enquiry than a source of true doctrine and sturdy piety, they must expound so firmly and skilfully and inculcate with such enthusiasm the authentic, and above all the dogmatic, meaning that their pupils may in some way experience what happened to the two disciples of Jesus on their way to Emmaus who, having heard the master's words, cried out: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32)' (E.B. 567). And the encyclical concludes: 'So the divine writings will for the future priests of the Church become a pure and perennial spring of spiritual life, for every one of them personally, and food and substance for the preaching office which awaits them' (*ibid.*). Because of the importance of this exegetical work the Council (inspired again by the encyclical *Divino Afflante*) concludes with warm words of encouragement which express all the Church's loving care: 'The sacred synod encourages those sons of the Church who specialize in biblical studies in order that, with ever renewed vigour, they may continue in the task they have begun, always showing loyalty to the mind of the Church' (no. 23).

The study of the sacred books is the soul of theology

The document now proceeds directly to an illustration of the significance of Holy Scripture in sacred theology.[9] First it declares the general principle, and then deduces the practical conclusion.

(1) The general principle is this: 'Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word' (no. 24). There is no need to explain again the precise meaning of the formula 'the written word of God,

[9] The connection between this paragraph and that which precedes it is that in the former the document has spoken of 'Catholic exegetes and other students of sacred theology' (no. 23). This indicates that it had already in mind theologians in the wide sense of the word, and now, having in the preceding section spoken of that special branch of theology which is Biblical exegesis, it passes on to the wider field of theology in general.

together with sacred tradition', because it merely summarizes the whole doctrine we have already explained and recalled in our comments on paragraph no. 21. Substantially it means that Holy Scripture can never be separated either from the whole sacred deposit of faith or from the tradition which hands it on, but must always be considered in the context of the living influence of tradition. For these reasons the document on *Revelation,* speaking of the interpretation of Scripture, declares that one must take into account 'the live tradition of the whole Church and the analogy of faith' (no. 12). Thus understood, Scripture constitutes the permanent foundation for theology; in it theology strengthens and renews itself continually.[10] One should perhaps also underline the christocentric concept of theology which is evident in this passage, which says that it strengthens and renews itself by 'scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ'. We shall see later on the part assigned to this christocentric concept in the reform of ecclesiastical studies desired and decided upon by the Council.

(2) Now we come to the second passage, the practical conclusion derived from the general principle. First of all it explains, as if by way of premise for the conclusion that follows, the reason for the pre-eminence of Scripture over tradition: 'The sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and, since they are inspired, really are the word of God' (*ibid.*; cf. also no. 9). The practical conclusion is this: 'and so the study of the sacred pages is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology' (*ibid.*).

(a) The first consideration—that the sacred writings not only enshrine (as does sacred tradition) the word of God, all that he has said to mankind, but are truly the word of God because inspired by him—substantially recalls what was said in paragraph no. 9 when the document was explaining the difference between tradition and Scripture. It now serves as a premise for the immediate conclusion that the study of the sacred writings must be the soul of theology. For in fact theology is essentially concerned with the thought of God, as perceived in divine revelation, and so naturally the written word of God which changelessly transmits God's thought must be like the souls of theology and of all its ramifications.

(b) The notion that Scripture must be, as it were, the soul of theology, is taken, as our document indicates, from the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* which states: 'It is moreover greatly desirable and necessary that the use of the divine Scriptures should wholly dominate theological study and be as it were its soul.'[11] Leo XIII then confirms this assertion from the writings of the fathers and the most renowned theologians: 'This was affirmed in all ages by the fathers and the most renowned theologians, who did indeed seek to establish and strengthen those truths which are the object of faith, and the others which are derived from them, above all by means of the sacred Scriptures, and by this means also and by the recourse to divine tradition they sought to confute the new criticism of heretics and to investigate the reason, essence and correlation of Catholic dogmas. This is not surprising when one remembers that, among the sources of revelation, such a pre-eminent place is assigned to the sacred writings that, without the study and assiduous use of these, it is impossible to study theology in a correct manner, adequate to its dignity' (*ibid.*).

(3) The importance which the Council attaches to the principles briefly expounded in our document is seen from the role it has assigned to Scripture both in the reform of theological study and in the training of future priests. The general principle, which is entirely dominated by a christocentric concept, is thus expressed in the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of*

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[10] This final notion of renewal is repeating an idea from the encyclical *Humani generis* which, speaking in general of the study of the sources of theology, that is, the *Magisterium* of the Church, the holy Scriptures and sacred tradition, asserts: 'For in the study of the sacred sources theological studies find their renewal' (cf. *Act. Ap. Sed.* 42, 1950, p. 568).

[11] E.B. 114; these words are quoted also in the encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus,* cf. E.B. 483.

Priests: 'In the revision of ecclesiastical studies the first object in view must be a better integration of philosophy and theology. These subjects should work together harmoniously to unfold increasingly to the minds of the seminarians the mystery of Christ, that mystery which affects the whole history of the human race, influences the Church continuously and is mainly interpreted by the priestly ministry' (no. 14).

As this christocentric viewpoint has its foundation in the history of salvation the same Decree indicates this practical way of applying the general principle: 'So that this understanding may be communicated to students from the very start of their training, ecclesiastical studies should begin with an introductory course of suitable duration. In this initiation the mystery of salvation should be presented in such a way that the students will see the meaning of ecclesiastical studies, their interrelationship, and their pastoral intent. They will be helped thereby to root their personal lives in faith and to permeate them with it. They will be strengthened to embrace their vocation with personal commitment and a joyful heart' (*ibid.*).

(a) These general principles are then applied to the various branches of theological learning. Concerning exegesis the same document says: 'In the study of sacred Scripture, which ought to be the soul of all theology, students should be trained with special care. After a suitable introduction to it, they should be carefully initiated into exegetical method, taught the pre-eminent themes of divine revelation, and take inspiration and nourishment from reading and meditating on the sacred books day by day' (*Priestly Formation*, no. 16).

(b) But it is not merely a question of training biblical scholars. Holy Scripture must exercise a profound influence over the whole of theology: 'Dogmatic theology should be so arranged that the Biblical themes are imparted first. Students should then be shown what the fathers of the Eastern and Western churches contributed to the effective transmission and illumination of the individual truths of revelation . . .' (no. 16). And it insists: 'Other theological studies should also be renewed by livelier contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation'.

More particularly the Decree requires: 'Special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology. Its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by Scriptural reading. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world' (*ibid.*).

(c) The directions imparted for the training of future missionaries are very much to the point. The *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, after having said that missionaries must be 'nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine' (I Tim. 4:6) adds: 'these they should draw principally from the sacred Scriptures as they study the mystery of Christ, whose heralds and witnesses they will be' (no. 26).[12]

Speaking of the training of priests in mission lands the Decree says that 'the whole training of students should be planned in the light of the mystery of salvation as it is revealed in the Scriptures. This mystery of Christ and of man's salvation they should discover and live in the Liturgy' (no. 16).

The Bible and the mystery of the word

Returning to the dominant thought of paragraph no. 21, that the preaching of the Church must be nourished and directed by Scripture, and to that of paragraph no. 24, that theology is strengthened and renewed in the written word of God, the Constitution applies these principles to the ministry of the word in all its forms: 'From the same scriptural word the ministry of the word also takes wholesome nourishment and yields fruits of holiness. This ministry includes pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all kinds of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold a privileged place' (no. 24).

(1) After what has been said about this in our comments on paragraph no. 21, there is no need to bring forward proofs of this affirmation. But it is useful to quote two statements from the supreme teaching office of the Church, which have become

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[12] The same Decree, speaking of the training of catechists, says it is necessary that they should 'learn Catholic doctrine, especially doctrine concerning the Bible and the Liturgy' (no. 17).

authoritative texts. The first is from *Providentissimus Deus*: 'It is this singular and characteristic virtue of Holy Scripture, derived from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which confers authority upon the sacred author, permits apostolic freedom of speech and imparts forceful and persuasive eloquence. In fact, he who in preaching imparts the spirit and the power of the divine word, is not preaching merely in words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (cf. I Thess. 1:5)' (E.B. 87). In the same way the encyclical *Divino Afflante,* warning preachers to beware of the ingenious search for convenient interpretations, gives this reason: ' "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12-13), and in order to move the heart and soul has no need of human artifice and compromise; the sacred pages, inspired by God, are in themselves full of meaning; endowed with divine power they are sufficient in themselves; adorned with supreme splendour they shine in their own light, provided that the interpreter, with careful and exact explanations, knows how to bring to the light all their hidden treasures of wisdom and prudence' (E.B. 553; cf. also E.B. 566). The same encyclical exhorts the clergy: 'The priests, who are bound by their office to work for the eternal salvation of the faithful, after having themselves most diligently studied the sacred pages and absorbed their message in prayer and meditation, must impart with due zeal in their sermons, homilies and exhortations, the heavenly riches of the divine word; they must confirm Christian doctrine with quotations from the sacred books and illustrate it with suitable examples drawn from sacred history and especially from the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ' (E.B. 566), and all this is to be done so that the faithful may not only live better lives but 'conceive a supreme veneration for Holy Scripture' (*ibid.*).

We must also underline the immense importance of the principle that every kind of ministry of the word is nourished and strengthened by the Bible. Its purpose is to ensure that all

members and sections of the Church truly live the written word of God. Let us think, for example,—leaving aside other forms of instruction—of the place which the sacred Liturgy, and above all the Mass with its own sermon, (and the Divine Office for all who share in it) occupy in the life of the Church. So we can in part foresee the vast and fruitful possibilities which these Council decrees offer for the growth of the knowledge of Scripture. In themselves alone these provisions already open out a wide field in which the Church may live the written word of God.

(2) As so much depends upon the priests we can understand why the Council immediately draws a practical conclusion with regard to their necessary training, insisting upon continual contact with Scripture: 'Therefore all the clergy must hold fast to the Scriptures with diligent reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists, who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word. This study of Scripture is required lest any of them become 'an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly', since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred Liturgy' (no. 25).

(a) This contact is mainly for the sake of the priest's own spiritual life and must be begun in his training, as the Council insists: 'Seminarians . . . should be taught to look for Christ in many places: in faithful meditation on God's word, in active communion with the most holy mysteries of the Church, especially in the Eucharist and the Divine Office' (*Priestly Formation,* no. 8). This grouping together of meditation on the word of God, of the Eucharist and of the Divine Office speaks for itself without the need of further explanations.[13]

Speaking of the life of the priests, the *Decree on the Ministry*

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[13] With regard to biblical studies for seminarists, the *Instruction* of the Pontifical Commission for Biblical studies, published in the time of Pius XII on the method of teaching Scripture asserts that for the studies 'a most useful habit is the daily reading of the Bible, which once constituted the daily meditation for both regular and secular clergy' (E.B. 592).

and Life of Priests affirms, with regard to the help they receive in their spiritual life: 'Of all spiritual helps, those acts are pre-eminent by which the faithful receive nourishment from God's word at the two-fold table of sacred Scripture and the Eucharist. It is obvious how important for the proper santification of priests is the energetic and frequent exercise of such acts' (no. 18). The same Decree points out, when speaking of the way in which priests may and must strive after holiness: 'Since they are ministers of God's word, they should every day read and listen to that word which they are required to teach to others. If they are at the same time welcoming this message into their own hearts, they will become ever more perfect disciples of the Lord. For as the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "Meditate on these things, give thyself entirely to them, that thy progress may be manifest to all. Take heed to thyself and to thy teaching, be earnest in them. For in so doing thou wilt save both thyself and those who hear thee" (I Tim. 4:15-16). As priests search for a better way to share with others the fruits of their own contemplation, they will gain a deeper understanding of the "unfathomable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8) as well as of "the manifest wisdom of God"' (no. 13).

(b) Even the learning which the priest must possess should be derived primarily from Scripture: 'The knowledge of a sacred minister should be sacred, since it is drawn from a sacred fountain and is directed to a sacred end. Hence that knowledge should be derived primarily from reading and meditation on the sacred Scriptures' (*ibid.* no. 19). In this spirit the Council requires priests to give sufficient time to theological studies (*ibid.*) and the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* explicitly mentions 'refresher' courses of Biblical studies, to be organized by the episcopal conferences for the benefit of the clergy (cf. no. 20).

Holy Scripture in the lives of the faithful

What the Constitution has already said about exegetes, theologians and priests, and how they are to offer the bread of the word to the faithful laity, must not lead us to believe that the role of the faithful is merely passive acceptance of this nourishment. They must themselves, according to the Council's directions, strive to read and study the word of God attentively. In fact, after having stressed the necessity that all those who share in the ministry of the word shall be in constant touch with Scripture, the document begs the faithful most urgently to study the sacred books and make abundant use of them: 'The sacred synod earnestly and specifically urges all the Christian faithful, too, especially religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8). "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (St Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, P.L. 24, 17). Therefore they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, are commendably available everywhere, thanks to the approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church' (no. 25).

(1) This is no new insistence, as we see when we remember certain similar appeals or utterances of recent Popes. St Pius X, as the encyclical *Divino Afflante* reminds us, had admired and encouraged the work of the *Society of St Jerome*, 'which aims at inducing the faithful to adopt the very praiseworthy habit of reading and meditating the holy gospels, and of facilitating this custom wherever possible. He exhorted the society to persevere with its endeavours, and affirmed that its word was the most useful and most suitable for the present age, and contributed greatly to breaking down the prejudice that the Church is opposed to the reading of the sacred Scriptures in the vernacular, or does her best to prevent it' (E.B. 544). Benedict XV, after having said that the aim of this society was to make more widely known the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, 'so that these books may at last find their place in every Christian family, and everyone may form the habit of

reading them and meditating upon them every day', continues: 'We earnestly desire to see this *Society of St Jerome*—so dear to our heart because we have understood its usefulness—spread and develop everywhere, with a foundation in every one of your dioceses . . .' (E.B. 478). To this same end the encyclical *Divino Afflante* asks the bishops to grant their favour and support to the religious societies which aim at the diffusion among the faithful of copies of the sacred books, especially of the holy gospels', and urges them to 'strive most earnestly to persuade Christian families to read them regularly every day with piety and devotion' (E.B. 566).

(2) This urgent appeal to study and make use of Scripture is found in many other Council documents. The *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, speaking to all the faithful, adds 'especially the religious' and is no doubt here thinking of those religious who are neither priests nor seminarists, for it has already spoken of these. In the *Decree on the Renewal of the Religious Life* the Council exhorts all religious in general to nourish their spiritual life primarily on the reading and meditation of the divine books: 'Let the members of communities energetically cultivate the spirit of prayer and the practice of it, drawing on the authentic sources of Christian spirituality. In the first place they should take the sacred Scriptures in hand every day by way of attaining "the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8) through reading these divine writings and meditating on them' (no. 6).

The Decree on the *Apostolate of the Laity* numbers among the aids to the apostolate a 'more profound knowledge of Holy Scripture' (no. 32). Speaking of the sources of the spirituality of the lay apostolates it says: 'Only by the light of faith and by meditation on the word of God can one always and everywhere recognize God in whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28), seek his will in every event, see Christ in all men whether they be close to us or strangers, and make correct judgments about the true meaning and value of temporal things, both in themselves and in their relation to man's final goal' (no. 4).

(3) Besides exhorting the faithful to study and meditate upon the Bible and Constitution adds some directions as to how this should be done. First of all it insists on the necessity of prayer: 'Let them [the faithful] remember that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to him when we pray; we hear him when we read the divine sayings"' (no. 25). The reason given here is very interesting. The document does not refer to the creature's need to approach the mystery of God with profound humility and awe, or to implore divine assistance in order to read and understand the word of God with profound faith.[14] This does not mean that the Constitution ignores these necessities, but simply that it wishes to indicate one which touches the very heart of that holy exercise, the reading of the sacred books. Prayer is necessary so that the reading may not be a purely intellectual and academic exercise, a merely human activity. There must be an authentic conversation with God, and this is brought about only by prayer because in this way man not only listens to God but speaks to him; appealing humbly to him as a sinful creature, he obtains the grace of the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures, and through them speaks to man from outside himself. Thus this Spirit will speak to him also from within his own soul, according to St John's words: 'The anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is

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[14] These themes appear in several encyclicals. *Providentissimus Deus* concludes with this appeal: 'With fatherly love we exhort all disciples and ministers of the Church to turn to the Holy Scriptures with great love, reverence and devotion, because the saving power of Scripture can never be applied, as is necessary, unless the arrogance of worldly knowledge is first removed, and unless all piously dedicate themselves to the earnest study of that wisdom which is superior to worldly studies' (E.B. 134; cf. E.B. 476, 592). In its turn *Divino Afflante* in its concluding words reminds the reader that St Augustine said one must 'pray in order to understand' (E.B. 569; cf. also 566; note also the example of St Jerome, as described in *Spiritus Paraclitus*, E.B. 469).

true, and is no lie, just as it has been taught you, abide in him' (I John 2:27). In this way whoever reads or meditates upon Scripture brings about in himself what the Constitution requires of the exegete—that he should unite himself interiorly with the primary author of Scripture, reading it 'according to the same Spirit by whom it was written' (no. 12).

(4) The document also lists the sacred hierarchy's special obligations regarding the laity's use of Scripture: 'It devolves on consecrated bishops, "who have the apostolic teaching" to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the gospels, through translations of the sacred texts. Such versions are to be provided with necessary and fully adequate explanations so that the sons of the Church may safely and profitably grow familiar with the sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their Spirit' (no. 25).

Let us note that this text refers particularly to the New Testament and above all to the gospels, in line with what was said already (nos. 17-19) about the pre-eminent position which the New Testament, and especially the gospels, occupy in the general framework of Holy Scripture.[15]

(a) What are the reasons for these special tasks of the bishops? We have already seen that the Bible is by no means easy to understand and (cf. no. 12, and above, chap 8, pp. 211 ff.). All readers, and especially the less instructed members of the laity, need help and learning to guide them along this difficult road, so that they may become familiar with Holy Scripture. The apostle Peter had already pointed out that this great gift of God, Holy Scripture, could become not life-giving nourishment but a means of destruction in the hands of ill instructed people, and especially in the case of those of wavering faith. Speaking of the letters of 'our beloved brother Paul' he said they had been written 'according to the wisdom given him'. 'There are some things in them' he went on 'hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures' (II Peter 3:15-16). How frequently this some sad phenomenon has been repeated in the history of the Church! It is because of her sense of responsibility for the faithful, and her love of souls, that the Church is so careful to watch over the use her members make of the word of God.

(b) That this task of guiding the faithful should be assigned particularly to the bishops is fundamentally merely a consequence of what the Constitution has explained about the handing on of divine revelation. Christ gave his apostles his mandate to preach the gospel and to instruct all men. Holy Scripture was born of this living preaching, of which it is but another form (cf. no. 7-8). The successors of the apostles cannot be content with merely making the gospel known, that is, simply handing over to men the book in which it is written. Their responsibility extends much further: they must see the gospel be effectively and rightly understood by men. 'Led by the light of the Spirit of truth', their mandate is to preserve, expound and spread the word of God (cf. no. 19). Tradition itself will interpret it authentically (cf. no. 10), and enable it to be more profoundly understood and effective (cf. no. 8). The manner of these explanations or commentaries given by the bishops may vary according to the psychology and mentality of men, but they are undoubtedly necessary and are the task and duty of the hierarchy and of all who collaborate with it.

Holy Scripture and ecumenism

The theme of Scripture in the life of the Church would be insufficiently dealt with if we did not refer, at least briefly, to its ecumenical implications. Since non-Catholic Christians 'are in real communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect', as the *Decree on Ecumenism* asserts (no. 3), the role played by holy Scripture in the lives of these Christians and the way in which the Council interprets this role, certainly belong to the general theme of this chapter.

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[15] We have already seen that recent Popes, especially St Pius X, Benedict XV and Pius XII, laid particular emphasis on the use of the New Testament, and especially of the gospels.

Of the whole vast subject the document only touches—as we shall see further on—the question of the translations of Holy Scripture produced by the common efforts of Catholic and non-Catholic Christians. But the *Decree on Ecumenism* deals with several matters in this connection.

(1) First of all, generally speaking, the Decree underlines the fact that among the various forms of the 'renewal of the Church' which is 'essentially grounded on an increase of fidelity to her own calling', the biblical movement has a 'notable ecumenical importance' (no. 6). In another context the same Decree declares: 'The sacred Scriptures provide for the work of dialogue an instrument of the highest value in the mighty hand of God for the attainment of the unity which the Saviour holds out to all' (*Ecumenism,* No. 21).

(2) To some extent the Council itself shows us the way to achieve this dialogue. After having recognized that even beyond the visible confines of the Catholic Church may be found good things, such as the written word of God, by which the Church is edified and refreshed, (cf. *ibid.* no. 3), the Council examines this fact more in detail. It frankly recognizes the differences that in this field divide Catholics from Reformation Christians: 'But while our separated Christian brethren hold strongly to the divine authority of the sacred books, they differ from us—some in one way, some in another—regarding the relationship between Scripture and the Church. For, according to Catholic belief, the authentic teaching of the Church has a special place in the interpretation and preaching of the written word of God' (*ibid.,* no. 21).

(a) The Council then asserts, as if as a basis for dialogue, all that we share in common with non-Catholic Christians: 'Love and reverence, almost a cult, for holy Scripture lead our brethren to a constant and fruitful study of the sacred text. For the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and then to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16)' (*ibid.*). And this is how the love and reverence are shown: 'Calling upon the Holy Spirit, they seek God in the Scriptures as speaking to them in Christ,[16] the Word of God made flesh for us, whom the prophets foretold. They contemplate in the Scriptures the life of Christ and what the divine master taught and did for our salvation, especially the mysteries of his death and resurrection' (*ibid.*).

(b) This reverence for holy Scripture felt by our separated brothers bears its fruit in their Christian lives: 'The daily Christian lives of these brethren are nourished by their faith in Christ. They are strengthened by the grace of baptism and by hearing the words of God. This shows itself in their private prayer, their meditation on the Bible ...' (*ibid.* no. 23). Here too the Council, although frankly acknowledging the existing divergences, asserts the possibility and indicates the basis for dialogue: 'While it is true that many Christians understand the moral teachings of the gospel differently from Catholics, and do not accept the same solutions to the more difficult problems of modern society, nevertheless they share our desire to stand by the words of Christ as the source of Christian virtue.... For that reason an ecumenical dialogue might start with discussion of the application of the gospel to moral conduct' (*ibid.*).

(c) Finally, the Council prepares the way for a common effort with non-Catholic Christians in the field of biblical studies. First of all the Constitution foresees the preparation, in common with our separated brethren, of translations of the Bible: 'If, given the opportunity and the approval of Church authority, these translations are produced in co-operation with our separated brethren, all Christians will be able to use them' (no. 22).

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[16] It is well known that in this passage the Latin *quasi sibi loquentem* has been interpreted in the sense 'as if he were . . . ' so that the text appears to deny that God really speaks to us in Holy Scripture. But this is an incorrect translation. The Latin *quasi* is not 'as if', as in the Latin grammars used in schools; both in biblical and in classical Latin it frequently means: 'so to speak, in a certain way'. Moreover, since the promulgation of this Constitution it would be impossible to believe that the Church denies that God truly speaks to us in Scripture. In fact, the Constitution affirms (cf. no. 21) 'In the sacred books our Father in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them'.

The same document, speaking of the preparation of editions of the Bible for the use of non-Christian peoples, says concerning their diffusion: 'Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these' (no. 25).

It is well known that both these measures taken by the Council have already partly revived the confidence of many non-Catholic Christians and encouraged new initiatives in the field of biblical studies. The most important of these is the preparation for a collaboration between Catholics and the United Bible Societies, that is, the World Federation of thirty-seven national non-Catholic Bible Societies. The first official news of this was given 11 November 1966 and a Congress of expert translators from both groups has already been held in Rome on 5 January 1967 to discuss the problems inherent in the preparation of common translations.

Holy Scripture in the missionary field

It was inevitable that the Council, when dealing with the vast field of the missionary activity of the Church, should give some thought to the special part played here by Scripture. The first measure taken in this field is the above-mentioned preparation of editions of the Bible for the use of non-Christian people: 'Editions of the sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable comments, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these' (no. 25). Here we see the Council's two-fold requirement: that besides prudently distributing the Scriptures among non-Christian people, the Church should diligently explain the same, and this explanation must be different from that which is offered to the faithful because it must be adapted to the condition of non-Christian people, and to the infinite variety of culture, mentality etc., presented by the various continents, countries and nations.

The Council makes another profound recommendation concerning the use of holy Scripture for missionary purposes. This refers to the problem of adapting the missions. All know the very difficult problem which faces missionaries in the course of their evangelization, that is, the problem of absorbing in a purified form elements of the native culture of every people, and creating from these a culture permeated with the spirit of the gospel. The *Decree on Missionary Activity* declares: 'The seed which is the word of God sprouts from the good ground watered by divine dew. From this ground the seed draws nourishing elements which it transforms and assimilates into itself. Finally it bears much fruit. Thus, in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches, rooted in Christ and built upon the foundation of the apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Psalm 2:8). From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace, and the proper arrangement of Christian life' (no. 12).

Now what is the best and most fruitful way of effecting this great synthesis? Here too the Council recommends the study of revelation and in particular of the written word of God: 'If this great goal is to be achieved, theological investigation must necessarily be encouraged in each major socio-cultural area, as it is called. In this way, in the light of the tradition of the universal Church, a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to Scripture, and which have been expounded by the Church fathers and the teaching authority of the Church. Thus it will more clearly be seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. As a result, avenues will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life' (no. 22). The Council then describes the happy result of this procedure: 'Every appearance of syncretism and of false particularism can be excluded, and Christian life can be accomodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture. Particular traditions, together with the individual patrimony of each family of nations, can be illumined by the light of the Gospel, and then be taken up into Catholic unity' (*ibid.*). It will be indeed difficult to achieve this result, but success will be all the more wonderful and significant.

The Constitution ends with a few words which to some extent recall the principal themes not only of this last chapter but of the document as a whole. As St Paul had exhorted the Thessalonians: 'Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph' (II Thess. 3:1), so now the Council expresses a hope: 'In this way, therefore, through the reading and study of the sacred books, let "the word of the Lord" run and be glorified' (no. 26). So the reading and study of the written word of God serve for the ever greater diffusion of the 'word of God' in general, that is, of all that God has wished to communicate to men in any form, written or oral. Therefore the document continues: 'let the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church increasingly fill the hearts of men' (*ibid.*), that is, may the whole sacred deposit of revealed truth, entrusted to the Church (cf. no. 10), achieve its final goal, that is, may it be received by men with perfect faith and total abandonment to God (cf. no. 5), so that God may admit them to communion with himself (cf. no. 2).

The last paragraph of the document expresses also the hope: 'Just as the life of the Church grows through persistent participation in the eucharistic mystery, so we may hope for a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's word, which 'lasts for ever (Is. 40:8; cf. I Peter 1:23-25)' (no. 26). As a comment upon these words let us immediately indicate some facts which illustrate it, in as much as they illustrate the close connection between the development of the life and activity of the Church in general during the last fifty years and the development of the eucharistic life and increased participation in the sacred mysteries. All are aware of the great revival in the life of the Catholic Church during recent years, a revival shown primarily in the vast and successful development of liturgical, biblical and missionary activity, in the apostolate of the laity and in gradual progress in the ecumenical field. It is a fact that the beginning of all this new growth can be seen in St Pius X's courageous decrees about the early communion of children and the frequent communion of all the faithful; these movements have grown step by step with the great development, occurring as the result of these decrees, of the eucharistic life, and of the active participation of the laity in the sacred mysteries. And this is no casual coincidence. St Pius X himself had from the very beginning of his pontificate declared that the 'first and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit' was 'an active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church' (*Discourse*, 22 November 1903).

There is then a close and obvious connection between frequent participation in the eucharistic mystery and the steady growth of the Church. And according to the Constitution we are discussing (no. 21) there is also a true parallelism between the Eucharist and Scripture. Each in its own way is the bread of life on which the Church lives and feeds her members. Consequently, the same intimate connection which exists between frequent participation in the eucharistic mystery and the increase of the Church's life, exists also between this increase and the frequent reception of the bread of the written word of God.

It is therefore easy to imagine the wonderful results which will be obtained from these great Conciliar directives concerning the reading, study, meditation and use of Holy Scripture in the Church. In fact, if all categories and all members of the Church live in this close contact—made up of reading, study, meditation and prayer—with the divine books, and if moreover we try to offer to non-Christian people also the chance of at least a first contact with these, then there is no doubt that the word of God will reveal and exercise its divine power for the salvation of men, for a great increase of divine life in the Church and, through her, in all mankind.

12 | God's kindness and love for men

It is characteristic of the Second Vatican Council that, unlike many other Councils, especially the earliest of these, it has considered questions of faith particularly from the point of view of men, or rather from the point of view of the society of the redeemed, the Church, in all the various aspects of her life and action, within herself and in the world. This is so much the case that at first sight it surprises us, almost as if the Council, in deference to a mistaken humanistic concept, had placed man instead of God at the centre of things. But a closer look convinces us that God and Christ are wholly present in every page of the conciliar documents and really form the centre from which all proceeds and to which all converges. In fact, a Christian cannot speak of man or understand him without continually referring to God's idea of man and all he does for him.[1]

This consideration is particularly true of the *Constitution of Divine Revelation*. Although it deals with God's revelation to man it does so, in accordance with divine revelation itself, with man in view, that is, 'so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe; by believing it may hope; and by hoping it may love' (no. 1).

Naturally this very way of expounding God's revelation has

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[1] These thoughts were clearly expressed by Pope Paul VI in his speech at the closing of the Council. The introspection which occurred in the Church during the Council, he explained, 'was not an end in itself, but an act of pure human wisdom, of spiritual awareness, not in order to delight in learned analyses of religious psychology or of her own history, or in order to re-affirm her rights and explain her laws, but to find once more the word of Christ living and working in the Spirit within her, and to examine more profoundly the mystery, that is the purpose and presence of Christ above and within herself . . .' (cf. *Osservatore Romano*, 8 December 1966, p. 1.).

inevitably led the Council to tell us also many things about God himself, but these things are told more or less as an aside and are found here and there in the whole document, like sparks flung from a meteorite. It is therefore necessary to consider them together in our concluding survey. It is fundamentally a question of recollecting ourselves before God, after our long and laborious study, for tranquil meditation and prayer, inspired by profound admiration and humble gratitude. This will also offer us the occasion to make a final reflection on the whole doctrine expounded in our document, in the light which comes from God, the centre and source of all things. What the document has told us about God, directly or indirectly, may be summed up under three headings: (1) the explicit affirmations about God and his dealings with men; (2) God's nature revealed in his gifts to men; (3) God's nature revealed in the way in which he has enabled men to carry out his plan of salvation.

Let us first consider what is said directly and explicitly about God and his dealing with men. God is 'just and merciful' (no. 15), 'the one living and true God, provident Father and just Judge' (no. 3), 'who through the word creates all things and keeps them in existence, and gives men an enduring witness to himself in created realities' (no. 3) because he, the 'beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason' (no. 6). God is 'invisible' (no. 2) because 'no man has ever seen or can see' him (I Tim. 6:16; cf. John 1:18; I John 4:12). But God wished to make himself known to men in a manner transcending human understanding (cf. no. 6); 'in his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself (no. 2) to men. He has shown 'thoughtful concern for our weak human nature' (no. 13); in fact, from all eternity he had intended and prepared with supreme love the salvation of the whole human race (cf. no. 14). He is 'our Father in heaven' (no. 21) who 'meets his children with great love and speaks with them' (no. 21).[2]

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[2] As we have seen, our texts sometimes speak of the revelation of God as a 'just Judge'. We shall return to this thought again and try to make it more precise. In fact, when we underline the kindness and love of God we do not

God reveals himself in his gifts

As we see, our document's explicit declarations about God and his dealings with men are few and brief. The divine gifts which he has showered on men speak much more clearly about him. It is as if God, and like him our Constitution too, has preferred to let deeds speak rather than words. In the words of St John he announced 'the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us', and he told us all that the apostles had seen and heard so that we also might have fellowship with them, and with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (cf. no. 1). 'Through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature' (no. 2). 'The invisible God, out of the abundance of his love, speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself' (*ibid.*), 'in order to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation' (no. 3). In conclusion: in divine revelation God wished to reveal and communicate himself and his eternal purposes with regard to the salvation of men, in order 'to share those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind' (no. 6).

God is personally present in his plan for salvation

Besides revealing himself in his gifts to men God reveals himself also, and very significantly, in the way in which He carries out his plan of salvation. He was not content with revealing himself and the mystery of his saving purpose (cf. no. 2) through chosen men, nor did it suffice for him to accomplish this revelation in all its fulness in the person of his only begotten Son. He wished to be personally present in his Son and to play his part in the accomplishment of salvation until its glorious fulfilment at the end of time: 'After speaking in many places and in various ways through the prophets, God last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son' (no. 4). The life that was with the Father was shown to us and was seen and heard on earth among men (cf. no. 1) in Christ, the 'Word made flesh' (no. 2). 'He sent his Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that he might dwell among men and tell them the innermost truths about God' (no. 4). In fact, 'Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, sent as "a man to men", "speaks the words of God", and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do. To see Jesus is to see his Father. For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover he confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed' (*ibid.*). The essence of this revelation is that 'God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us to eternal life' (*ibid.*).

God wished also to be present with his own words in the carrying out of his saving purpose: 'With thoughtful concern for our weak human nature' he adapted his language to our needs. 'For the words of God, expressed in human language,

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wish to exaggerate, or to dissimulate the truth, for the thought of God as Judge is an essential part of the revelation of God in both the Old and New Testaments. Here we are trying merely to point out his kindness as shown in his divine gifts and his manner of effecting the salvation of men. These proceed from his love, and so reveal his goodness and his immense love for man.

In fact, speaking of man's free response to God who reveals himself, we have shown that as long as man is being tested, the thought of divine judgment is of service to effect his salvation, in order that man may become aware of the gravity of his condition in the eyes of God, and of the consequences of his response to God's revelation (cf. chap. 4, pp. 99 ff.).

All these elements must then be considered in their rightful place: the thought of God's just and strict judgment, at the end of man's trial, must not obscure God's love and kindness to men, while he is being put to the test; on the other hand, God's divine love and kindness must not make us forgetful of his inevitable, severe and terrible judgment, which awaits the man who refuses to entrust himself to God in the obedience of faith. It is equally mistaken and dangerous to forget or overlook either of these two fundamental truths of our faith.

have been made like human speech, just as of old the Word of the eternal Father, when he put on weak human flesh, became like other men' (no. 13).

In his loving kindness God has even adapted his speech and his revelation of himself to the various situations of mankind. In the Old Testament he revealed himself 'in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ' (no. 15); in the writings of the New Testament 'the word of God, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe, is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way' (no. 17); finally, 'among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the gospels have a special pre-eminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness of the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our Saviour' (no. 18).

In this way 'in the sacred books our Father in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them' (no. 21).

In the sacred writings 'God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of his beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, though whom the living voice of the gospel resounds in the Church, and through her in the world, leads believers to all truth and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them' (no. 8). Just as Christ gave his own body for men to eat and his own blood for them to drink, because whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life (cf. John 6:54), so in Scripture God offers to man and to the Church the spiritual bread of his own word, as nourishment for faith. In fact, 'the force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life. Consequently, these words are perfectly applicable to sacred Scripture: "For the word of God is living and efficient" (Heb. 4:12) and is "able to build up and give the inheritance among all the sanctified" (Acts 20:32; cf. I Thess. 2:13)' (no. 21).

God makes men his collaborators

But although the initiative for the supernatural salvation of man is God's alone, and he is not only personally present among men in his Son but also wishes to effect his plan of salvation through him, all this does not mean that his role and that of Christ are substitutes for the role of man, which would leave man in the humiliating position of one who merely receives passively the divine gifts. God grants to man the great honour of being closely associated with him in the work of effecting his own salvation, so that he may co-operate in effecting his redemption in time and in eternity. In fact, God requires and earnestly demands man's active co-operation. So salvation for the individual and for mankind as a whole depends on the common labour of God and man in every sphere and upon every plane.

(1) This is above all true of man's response to God's revelation of himself: 'The obedience of faith must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals, and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him' (no. 5). In this response of man, which at first sight might seem to be man's own doing, we see once more the characteristic co-operation between God and man. Man must freely entrust himself to God in faith, but he can only do this through the profound action of the Spirit of God within him: 'If this faith is to be shown, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind, and giving joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it' (*ibid.*). The divine assistance is not given merely for initial faith, but also for its progress and perfection. Certainly all believers must study the faith, reflect and meditate upon it (cf. no. 8), but for all this they need the assistance of the Holy Spirit who by means of his gifts enables them to reach a deeper understanding of the revealed truth.

To conclude: for the individual both initial faith and its growth are the fruit of the co-operation between God and man. Man freely consents to God's revealed truth, but can do so only under the constant and profound influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, man must contribute with study and meditation to his own growth in faith, but it is the Holy Spirit which perfects it with his gifts.

(2) The very close co-operation between God and man is found not only in individual lives but also in the social activity of the Church, and here also in all spheres, as we shall at once explain. First of all we consider the great honour of God's trust in individual man and in mankind as a whole; after Christ has brought to its fulfilment the revelation of God and preached the gospel, he entrusted its transmission through the ages to the apostles and their successors, that is, to the Church. He ordered the apostles to preach to all men the gospel which had been proclaimed in former times through the prophets and which Christ himself had fulfilled and promulgated, as 'the source of all saving truth and moral teaching', and so to impart the divine gifts to the people (cf. no. 7). But this does not mean that Christ, that God himself, had totally withdrawn himself and was not present in this transmission effected by men: 'The Lord Jesus was with his apostles as he had promised, and sent to them as Paraclete the Spirit who would lead them into the fulness of truth' (no. 20). In this way Christ's command 'was faithfully obeyed by the apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example and by institutions, handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with him, and from what he did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The order was obeyed too by those apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing' (no. 7). Moreover, the apostles, 'in order to keep the gospel for ever whole, and alive within the Church, left bishops as their successors, "handing on their own teaching role" to them' (*ibid.*). Thus 'to the successors of the apostles sacred tradition hands on in its full purity God's word, which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit so that, led by the light of the Spirit of truth, these successors can in their preaching preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known' (no. 9).

To expound God's word means also to interpret it; 'The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercized in the name of Jesus Christ' (no. 10). The great act of faith with which Christ entrusts to men the transmission of his gospel does not signify that he has abandoned his apostles. Together with his Holy Spirit he is always with his messengers, so that they are illumined by the Spirit of truth (cf. no. 9); in this way 'the living voice of the gospel resounds in the Church' by means of the Holy Spirit (cf. no. 8). All the different ways of handing on revealed truth to men 'contribute effectively to the salvation of souls' but all this is effected with the assistance of the Holy Spirit (cf. no. 10). In conclusion, after having preached his gospel Christ entrusted it to men, so that they might preserve, expound and preach it, but in all this work he does not leave them alone but assists them and sends to them his own divine Spirit to illuminate and guide them. The transmission of divine revelation is the result of a co-operation between God and men.

Christ's trust in men is not confined merely to the apostles and their successors, but extends to all members of the Church. In fact, the preservation and transmission of divine revelation to succeeding generations are not entrusted exclusively to the successors of the apostles and their close collaborators, the hierarchy, but in various ways to the entire Church: 'The apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter, and to fight in defence of the faith handed on once and for all' (no. 8). In holding fast to the 'sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church' 'the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread, and in prayers, so that in holding to, practising and professing the heritage of the faith, the bishops and the faithful may be united in a common effort' (no. 10). And since 'what was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life and the increase in faith of the people of God' (no. 8), 'the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is and all that she believes' (*ibid.*). In other words, just as the messianic people is 'established by Christ as a fellowship of life, charity and truth, it is also used by him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth' (*Church*, no. 9), so the whole Church remains always in the service of mankind to hand on to future generations the divine treasure of the word of God.

The close and vast collaboration between God and man, between Christ and the Church, in carrying out the plan of salvation is seen also in the development of sacred tradition. It is true that 'this tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the truths and the words which have been handed down' (no. 8). But it is also true that believers collaborate in various ways in this development. In fact this understanding grows 'through the contemplation and study of believers, who treasure these things in their hearts, through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth' (*ibid.*). There is then, together with the essential contribution of the successors of the apostles, the varied and specific contribution made by all believers.

(3) The close collaboration between God and man, between Christ and his Spirit on the one hand and the Church on the other, is found particularly in everything which concerns Holy Scripture. In order to ensure to the transmission of revealed truth the maximum of fidelity and certainty, God bestowed on

the Church the gift of his written word, the divine books: 'Inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God himself immutably, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and apostles' (no. 21). But God did not create these Scriptures all by himself: they are the result of his collaboration with men he had chosen for this purpose: 'In composing the sacred books God chose men who while employed by him made use of their own powers and abilities, so that with him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, wrote down all and only those things which he wanted to be written' (no. 11). Consequently, the word of God bears both the seal of God, its principal author, and that of a human author. Therefore, while the divine books make their own great and essential contribution to the faithful transmission of revelation, in as much as they 'teach firmly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation' (*ibid.*), this contribution also is, although in a different way, the result of a collaboration between God and man.

The same co-operation is seen in the use made by the Church of the sacred books. By means of his written word God continues to speak to the Church, and the Holy Spirit leads believers into all truth (cf. no. 8), but this also comes about by means of an authentic and necessary collaboration with sacred tradition. It is in fact tradition which 'enables the Church to know the whole canon of the sacred books' (no. 8), that is, presents these books to the Church as the word of God; and it is tradition which makes Scripture 'more profoundly understood and increasingly effective' (*ibid.*). In the use made by the Church of God's written word we have also the contribution made by biblical scholars, with their arduous labours. Their task is to 'work . . . for a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature' (no. 12).

Finally, in the use made of Scripture there is a still more vast sphere for the co-operation of the whole Church. God has prepared and offers to men the bread of his word, but it is the members of the Church who in various ways and on various levels work together so that this word may truly become the food, strength and vigour of the Church. In a general way 'the Church, the pupil of the Holy Spirit, is concerned to advance day by day towards a deeper understanding of the sacred Scriptures so that she may unceasingly feed her sons with the divine words. Therefore, she also rightly encourages the study of the holy fathers of both East and West, and of sacred Liturgies' (no. 13). She also co-operates by offering the faithful 'easy access to sacred Scripture,' by preparing the texts (cf. no. 22), giving this food to the faithful, especially in the sacred Liturgy, and guiding them so that they may make a right use of it (cf. no. 25). They also collaborate who help to train ministers of the divine word able to offer the people of God the nourishment of the Scriptures (cf. no. 23). Sacred theology also plays its part, for it 'rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation'. It is 'most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word'; therefore 'the study of the sacred Book is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology' (no. 24). Then there is the preaching of the Church which, like Christianity itself, must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture (cf. no. 21); from this 'the ministry of the word which also includes pastoral preaching, catechetics and all kinds of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily holds a privileged place, takes wholesome nourishment and yields fruits of holiness' (no. 24). This collaboration is so necessary that the Council declares: 'Therefore all the clergy must hold fast to the sacred Scriptures through diligent reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists, who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word' (no. 25). Finally, all the faithful must collaborate so that the word of God may become the food of their souls and must learn by 'frequent reading of the divine Scriptures', and 'gladly put themselves in touch with sacred text itself', whether it be through the

Liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, are commendably available everywhere, thanks to the approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church' (no. 25).

In conclusion, God has therefore not only bestowed divine gifts on man, but has also shown his great trust in him, offering him the opportunity to share with him in creating his own 'divine' greatness—his temporal and eternal destiny. And it is not surprising that God should put such trust in man, for he had created and renewed him in his own image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24), he had made him in the likeness of his own Son (cf. Rom. 8:29) and had sent his own divine Spirit into his own heart, to dwell therein as in his temple (cf. I Cor. 3:16; 6:19), to make him aware of his own divine sonship, to give him filial love for his heavenly Father (cf. Gal. 4:5-6; Rom. 8:15-16), to guide him, to pray within his soul and to inspire him (Rom. 8:13-14, 26-27; Gal 5:16-17). Surely man, with all these gifts, was truly enabled to collaborate with Christ, the 'first-born among many brethren' (Rom. 8:29), with the divine Spirit and with the heavenly Father himself, and all the more so as this collaboration is all illumined, inspired and permeated by the constant activity of Christ and of his Spirit in man, because of which a man can say with St Paul: 'By the grace of God I am what I am' and again, about his own labours: 'it was not I [who worked] but the grace of God which is with me' (I Cor. 15:10).

So in the wonderful, truly divine gifts of eternal life which God offers to men and in the way in which he guides them so that they may accept them, are revealed the supreme goodness and wisdom of God and his kindness and great love for men. In revelation and in the fulfilment of the mystery of his purpose of salvation we see 'the goodness and loving kindness of God in our Saviour' (Titus 3:4). It is this love which leads God to make man a sharer in his own life and to honour him by enabling him to co-operate in the realization of divine glory and happiness. Therefore 'the Church constantly moves forward towards the fulness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her' (no. 8). While the Church strives towards this goal 'sacred tradition and the sacred Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see him as he is, face to face' (no. 7) and so to live in perfect fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (cf. no. 1) in the Holy Spirit. Then 'his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads, and night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 22:3-5).

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Introductory Note

(1) As our book makes no claim to be a scientific thesis, in the strict sense of the word, we shall avoid burdening the reader with a mass of erudite information or a carefully detailed bibliography, even if only approximately complete. Therefore as a general rule we refer only to books which offer *complete* commentaries on the entire *Constitution on Divine Revelation* (excluding articles which deal only with particular aspects). Moreover, we do not provide a special bibliography for the single chapters or questions treated therein since the reader may find all he needs in the various commentaries listed in this bibliography.

(2) On the other hand, the author has decided to mention here those of his own published works which illustrate the particular questions treated, because some readers may be eager to study the author's thought at greater length.

(3) (a) The commentaries are arranged in alphabetical order.
(b) The studies contained in collections are here referred to simply by the author's name, so that the reader may easily find the particular article.
(c) For the sake of clarity the author's various publications are usually referred to by the first word of the title, but in some rare cases in the bibliography the title is followed by its abbreviation (for example, *De Inspiratione*).

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